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Boundaries of Respectability: New Women of Bangladesh

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Women and Gender Studies

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Declaration

This thesis constitutes my own original work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis places respectable femininity at the centre of the construction and performance of new womanhood among affluent middle-class women of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Using qualitative research methods, combining audio-visual materials, focus group discussion and multiple in depth interviews, I examine the complex and heterogeneous constructions of new womanhoods in relation to women's negotiations with public and private sphere roles and Bangladeshi norms of female propriety. My conceptual framework facilitates analysis of the everyday interactional negotiations of new women in relation to their gendered and classed practices of respectable femininity, and the potential for this boundary work to enhance their agency. My analysis illuminates three aspects of the dialogical nature of respectable femininity and new womanhood. First, new women are part of the neoliberal affluent middle class and they construct their class identity as a status group, claiming inter-class and intra-class distinction from other women. Their claims to distinction rest on their levels of higher education, types of paid employment and exposure to transnational lifestyles, alongside their gendered, classed and culturally attuned selfhood performed through their 'smart' aesthetic practices, 50-50 work home life balance and female individualism. Secondly, new womanhood is legitimized by alternative and multiple practices of respectability, varying according to women's age, stage of life, profession, household setting and experience of living in western countries. Finally, as new women forge alternative forms of respectability theirs is not a straightforward abandonment of old structures of respectability; rather they conform to, negotiate and potentially transgress normative conceptions of middle-class respectable femininity, substituting, concealing, or legitimizing particular practices in particular fields. Nonetheless, these processes enable them to practice increased autonomy and agency, and while their gains are vested in the self, rather than a wider feminist politics, they have the potential to positively influence the terrain of possibilities for other Bangladeshi women. Overall, my thesis shifts the focus of respectability research in South Asia from exploring the binary of respectable and unrespectable practices to evaluating how women make and remake their respectable status and class privilege in neoliberal Bangladesh, and the implications for gender relations.

List of Abbreviations

ADB- Asian Development Bank

CEDAW- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

GDI-Gender-Related Development Index

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

ILO- International Labour Organization

MDG-Millennium Development Goals

UN- United Nations

UNDP- United Nations Development Program

VPP- Village Phone Program

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of how the identity of new womanhood is constructed and performed in urban Bangladesh, through classed gender practices of respectable femininity. In so doing the research seeks to broadly answer the question – how does being respectable impact ‘new womanhood’ and how do new women subject positions contribute to an understanding of normative conceptions of middle-class respectable femininity in Bangladesh? Drawing from feminist research traditions, focus group discussions, audio-visual materials and multiple in-depth interviews with urban, affluent middle-class Bangladeshi women were deployed to generate qualitative data for analysis. Bangladesh is going through a significant transition due to globalization and neoliberalization of its economy and has a distinctive affluent middle class who engage in the service sector of the economy, with exposure to global education, professions and media. Gender roles within this class are also changing as more women enter public arenas through education and paid employment, affecting women’s status, opportunities and the domestic division of labour.

While there has been substantial research on the changing lives of Bangladeshi women in the rural and urban poor and lower middle class, addressing how women’s access to income-generating activities affects empowerment-related issues of agency, mobility, decision-making, household power dynamics etc., there has been rather less research about affluent middle-class¹ Bangladeshi women and the transformations in their lives. Nonetheless, there is a nascent literature in Bangladesh, and a more

¹ The middle class in Bangladesh is not a monolithic or homogeneous group. Although participants of this research identify themselves as middle-class women and their understanding of respectability is in line with middle-class notions of propriety, I read them as a specific constellation, a subset of the middle-class. And particularly due to their economic prosperity derived from neoliberal jobs and dual earner families, I consider them as part of an affluent middle-class community of Bangladesh.

established literature within South Asia more broadly, that identifies them as new women; affluent middle-class women who are argued to hold a balance between so-called progressive femininity, in terms of being highly educated and economically productive, and traditional gender roles. These studies argue that new women's image in South Asia is being created and reinvented continuously, but that changes are circumscribed by classed and gendered practices of respectability and associated discourses about middle-class women's domesticity and propriety in everyday life. Following these examples, I contend that respectability is an integral aspect of the construction of new womanhood in urban Bangladesh, and a useful tool through which to analyse the position of affluent middle-class women in the rapidly changing society of Bangladesh. However, I also refine the understanding of respectability by shifting the focus from what is respectable and unrespectable practice, to how women themselves construct and reconstruct their respectable status at the individual level.

The motivation for this thesis is an outcome of my own Bangladeshi middle-class background and the academic fields I have been exposed to through my global education. I was born and raised in a middle-class family in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and growing up I observed the various gender inequalities around me. I acquired an undergraduate degree in International Development Studies, with a specialization in Gender, and through this I was introduced to a large literature on gender (in)equality and women's empowerment, particularly in developing countries, which primarily focussed on poor women's oppression and discrimination. The literature seemed to suggest that in developing countries like Bangladesh, education and income had some positive impact on women's unequal position in society. However, I observed clear similarities between the sites of discrimination for poor women identified in the literature and those for the middle-class women around whom I grew up. Especially

within the home, in their relationship with other men and women, and in their negotiations of public/private mobility, women have to continually struggle to negotiate for their rights in Bangladesh, regardless of their class. The fact that many of the middle-class women I grew up around were highly educated and quite a few also pursued a career made me question the extent to which education, paid employment and the privilege of social class reduced gender inequality in Bangladesh. Hence the motivation for this doctoral research is to explore this issue and to give voice to the affluent middle-class women in Bangladesh, who, despite their class privilege, are in a continuous struggle to create a positive image and position for themselves in society. In this chapter I introduce the rationale, conceptual framework and distinctiveness of my doctoral research, outline my methodology, provide an overview of my main arguments and explain the thesis structure.

Locating My Research

Skeggs (1997:1) has argued that ‘feminist (and) cultural theory proliferates with theories of identities and subjective constructions, but few of these theories explore the processes by which ‘real’ women negotiate and understand them“selves”.’ Following her claim, in this research I aim to explore Bangladeshi new women’s understanding of the ‘self’ through their negotiations of normative conceptions of respectability, measured in terms of domesticity and propriety. In doing so, I bring together several literatures: on the sociology of class (Bourdieu, 1992, 2008) and its feminist appropriations (Moi, 1991; Skeggs, 1997; 2004a; Lovell, 2000); on the performative nature of social categories of gender and class (West and Zimmerman, 1991, 2009; West and Festermaker, 1995) and on boundary work (Lamont, 1992; Southerton, 2002), using them concurrently to analyse how new womenness is

achieved through continuous negotiation with the normative boundaries of middle-class respectable femininity in urban Bangladesh. Additionally, quite early on in my research, clothing practices and aesthetic norms were identified as a significant source of class distinction by participants (illuminated in the first phase of data collection). Consequently I added the concept of aesthetic labour (Warhurst et al, 2000; Witz et al, 2003) to my framework as well. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first research that uses the concepts of respectability and new womanhood to explore how affluent middle-class Bangladeshi women understand themselves in relation to others and negotiate their position in their family, workplaces and society at large. Furthermore, the research focuses on women's voices, experiences and interpretations to understand how the identity of new womanhood is constructed and performed at the individual level, through conforming, negotiating and transgressing norms of Bengali middle-class respectable femininity.

When it comes to gendered research about Bangladesh, international development research assuming poor women subjects has proliferated, representing them as bogged down by poverty, tradition and oppressive patriarchal societal structures that deny them the right to be seen or heard and leave them unable to earn or handle money and assets or assert their subject-hood or agency (Chowdhury, 2002:411). A common solution to this problem is then suggested to be female participation in the labour market, which is also important for economic growth and poverty reduction. Following such assumptions, the NGO initiative of microfinance² can then be presented as a policy solution to women's predicament, bringing about their economic

² Microfinance is a group-based loan for entrepreneurs and small businesses lacking access to banking and related services. It was pioneered in Bangladesh by Nobel Peace prize winner Mohammad Yunus in 1983, primarily targeting rural poor women.

productivity, social wellbeing and empowerment.³ Several researchers argue that although microfinance may not provide ‘automatic’ empowerment of women, and many women may not be able to assert control over their loan, it constitutes an entry point into the larger project of poverty reduction and empowerment, with potential for social transformation of women’s position in Bangladeshi society (Kabeer, 2011, 2005, 2001, 1998; Karim, 2008; Goetz and Sengupta, 1996; Hashemi et al, 1996; Sobhan, 1997; Rahman, 1999; Ackerly, 1995). Another force understood to be changing poor women’s position in Bangladesh is the rapid expansion of the readymade garment industry (RMG) sector, where the majority of employees are poor rural–urban migrant women. Women’s employment in this sector is argued to contribute to poverty reduction and help them gain ‘limited’ empowerment, through gaining greater autonomy in decision making and control over income, even if they have to conceal this so as not to disturb the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife (Kabeer, 1997, 2000, 2008; Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004; Ward et al, 2004; Murayama, 2005; Salway et al, 2005).

While research on microfinance has focussed on the agricultural sector of the Bangladeshi economy, which employs the greatest proportion of working women (68.84%), and research on women in the RMG industry addresses the sector with the lowest proportion of working women (13.32%), there is a third sector, the service sector, which has been a stable source of income for educated women for decades, employing 21.89% of working women (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2010:46). Moreover, this sector is slowly expanding (the employment rate increased from

³ Empowerment is defined as ‘the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability’ (Kabeer, 1999:435). Kabeer (2001) identifies empowerment as a process of change that defines power in terms of the ability to make choices.

19.50% in 2006 to 21.89% in 2010) alongside the globalization and neoliberalization of the Bangladeshi economy. A new field of research is emerging which addresses various aspects of urban middle-class educated women's work in this service sector. On the one hand there are studies focussed on issues of continuity in working women's inequality, such as men's control over women's wages (Chowdhury, 2009), working women's lack of time for leisure (Huda and Akhtar, 2005) and how practices of Islam affect women's middle-class Bengali identities (Huq, 2011). On the other hand, some research focusses on more radical shifts, such as women's understanding of their sexuality and practices of non-heterosexual relationships (Karim, 2010; 2012), perspectives on divorce (Parvez, 2011), how childless women avoid isolation in society (Nahar and Richters, 2011) and young urban new women's negotiations with work, religion, sexuality and marriage (Azim, 2007). I locate my research between these two groups, as I analyse both change and stasis in middle-class women's lives in relation to their gender and class identities.

When it comes to research specifically on contemporary new womanhood, this has emerged primarily from India. For example, research has explored Indian middle-class new women's engagement in neoliberal professions such as the IT sector, identifying them as consumers of Western media images, products and practices who simultaneously mark the nation's entry into the modern, global world, while largely remaining within the margins of traditional gendered values of respectability (Talukdar and Linders, 2013; Radhakrishnan, 2009; Mankekar, 2009). In contemporary Bangladesh, new womanhood has been touched upon by Karim (2010, 2012), who argues that some educated, mobile and economically powerful new women provide a threat to the ideal heterosexual family unit, through breaking out of their prescribed gender roles and practising non-heterosexual relationships.

Meanwhile, Azim (2002) has studied new womanhood in 19th century novels, when Bengali new women were trying to break out of women's confinement within the home, and in contemporary society Azim (2007) identifies the Bangladeshi new women as relatively young professionals (or students) who embody and illuminate issues of sexuality, marriage and paid employment, rather than those of motherhood, children and housework, which occupied previous generations of women. Azim urges us to 'read' these new women in a way that brings out the empowering factors in their lives, 'to look at how they are reframing the cultural contours that surround them' (ibid), and I take up this invitation on the basis of empirical research about women's lives, although also paying attention to cultural constructions of new women in Bangladesh. I go beyond the binaries of change and stasis, as if they are always imposed on women and recognize that women themselves construct and reconstruct their identities in relation to societal change.

Skeggs (1997:1) argues that 'respectability is usually a concern of those who are not seen to have it'. However, a review of the South Asian literature demonstrates that it is also a concern of those who are at risk of losing it. Research on respectability in South Asia conceptualizes middle-class respectability as a symbol of the interplay between gender, class and nation, which allows new women to engage in the global economy as workers and consumers, but only guarantees their high status as cultural and nationalist icons if they ultimately prioritize their family over their careers (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Fernando and Cohen, 2013; Hewamanne, 2012; Thapan, 2004). This research is concerned with how new women negotiate their careers to maintain respectability, but it does not explicitly address how they negotiate their domestic roles and relationships in so doing and the potential for new ways of being. Radhakrishnan (2009) comes the closest, noting that while discourses of 'restraint',

‘balance’, ‘knowing the limit’ and ‘just the right amount of freedom’ mark respectability, some ‘alternative femininities’ are sanctioned. But neither Radhakrishnan nor any other respectability researchers explore these ‘alternative femininities’, how they might operate, impact on women’s everyday practices within the home, and what their transformative potential might be. In this research I seek to explore alternative forms of respectable femininities and recognize new women’s potential for individual level transformations both within the home and at workplaces.

Overall, my research seeks to contribute to the nascent literature on Bangladeshi new women of the affluent middle class by addressing their everyday practices and negotiations both at home and at work, as well as their identities and aspirations. So I am interested in their work-home balance and how they maintain it, their clothing practices, their hopes and experiences in terms of career, marriage and motherhood, and I pay attention to aspects of continuity as well as change. The concept of respectability is of interest in terms of how normative conceptions of middle class respectable womanhood influence new women’s career options, but also in terms of how they play out in their family life. And I am also concerned with the potential for new women to shift the boundaries of respectable femininity, and what might make this possible. I seek to understand new women’s agency in a dialogical process with wider social structures, each shaping and being shaped by the other.

My research uses qualitative methodology to generate data and my access to participants is capitalized on extended social networks, including some participants who are friends and acquaintances of mine. This provided opportunities for us to co-construct the meanings of new women’s practices of respectability, and at the same time the use of an iterative and inductive research methodology allowed me to focus

on themes that emerged from participants' responses, changing the pre-decided focus of my research. Arranging multiple interviews with the 21 participants over a year-long period facilitated an experience-centred narrative approach to data collection. It gave me an opportunity to access participants' framing of and understanding of issues, practices, relations and events over time. An initial focus group discussion premised around selected audio-visual materials served as a way to derive definitions of new women from the field, helping in part to overcome the difficulty of me having decided in advance who they were, and these materials further served as a stimuli in the first interview with participants.

I make three arguments on the basis of my research. First, new women are part of an affluent middle-class community of urban Bangladesh who construct their class identity as a status group, claiming inter-class and intra-class distinction through their capital investments and performances of alternative forms of respectable femininity. Second, these alternative forms of respectability are not necessarily an abandonment of the normative conception of middle-class respectability; enabled by class privilege and access to resources new women sometimes conform, sometimes (re)negotiate and also show potential for transgressing normative conceptions of middle-class respectability in urban Bangladesh. In doing so, they colonize some practices that were previously deemed as unrespectable and seek to render them respectable. Third, new women's practices of respectability are neither fixed nor homogeneous, revealing multiple constructions and reconstructions of respectable practices in relation to age, stage of life (marital and motherhood status), experience of living in Western countries, types of profession and household settings. Thus new women perform respectability differently and in multiple ways in urban Bangladesh.

Thesis Structure

The first substantive chapter of the thesis provides a literature review of historical and contemporary constructions of new womanhood, simultaneously drawing on the changing nature of respectability as a symbolic capital and lived practice in various regions and at various times. I outline that the oppositional ideologies of women's public and private engagement and moral concerns around women's propriety through national and Western (local and global) practices are the dominant discourses around new womenhood and respectable femininity in South Asia. As the historical literature in South Asia identifies new womanhood as a middle class phenomenon, I also provide a review of how middle-class social structure is conceptualized in Bangladesh today.

Chapter two sets out the conceptual framework used to evaluate constructions of class and gender, and the boundaries that constitute these identities. The chapter discusses three key concepts or sets of concepts: the sociology of class and distinction; doing and redoing gender and difference; and boundary work, and explains how I combined elements of them to analyse the boundary work performed by new women in relation to their conformation, negotiation and transgression of normative conceptualizations of middle-class respectability. I also present my research questions in this chapter.

The third chapter elaborates my research methodology, including the methods, process and ideas about feminist research that inspired this thesis. I explain my choice of qualitative research methodology, the particular methods of audio-visual materials, focus group discussion and multiple in-depth interviews and their rationale, how I obtained my sample from extended networks and the iterative nature of my analytical framework.

Chapter four sets the thesis in context by providing background material on Bangladesh that I can then rely on in the analytical chapters. It highlights Bangladeshi women's broadly inconsistent progress narratives in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. I also pay particular attention to the Bangladeshi economy, identifying the service sector as the second largest employer of women in the country and explaining how men and women's employment in this sector has resulted in the flourishing of an urban middle class.

Chapters five through eight present the data analysis, focussing on new women's conformation, negotiation and transgression of middle-class respectability norms. Chapter five addresses the first research question, asking to what extent participants identify as a new woman and how is the new woman configured in Bangladesh from their perspectives. Through analysing participants' responses to the selected audio-visual materials, I outline the characteristics of new women in Bangladesh and how the participants come to identify themselves as new women. I identify two defining practices of alternative forms of respectable femininity which constitute participants' identification of new womanhood, one in the workplace and one in the home, and set out to explore these further in the following chapters.

In chapter six, I focus on the workplace and take up the issue of the aesthetic practices of new women, which I term 'smart dressing'. I articulate new women's smart clothing practices in relation to boundaries of classed, cultural, religious, western and organizational influences, to answer the second research question, how do the new women (re)do respectability in the context of workplaces? I illuminate the complex and nuanced boundary work of new women, which is influenced by their work

organization, age and experience of living in Western countries, and resist any simplistic binary understanding of respectable and unrespectable aesthetic practices.

Chapter seven focuses more on the home and discusses the second defining characteristic of new womanhood, their 50-50 work-home life balance. It answers the third research question, how do the new women (re)do respectability in the context of family? The new types of household settings that some new women are involved in, changing power relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and new women's capacity to renegotiate their socializing duties are all addressed. I elaborate how these practices enable new women to substitute for or selectively perform their domestic duties, enabling them to have more autonomy and to devote more time to their careers.

In chapter eight, I address some characteristics of the new women which participants did not identify themselves at the start of the research, but which my analysis has elucidated. This chapter also answers my final research question, to what extent do new women transgress norms of respectable femininity, and how? I argue that new womenness is influenced by the individualizing turn of neoliberal economy, where women look for 'breathing space' outside the norms of respectability, through pursuing self-fulfilment goals, delaying motherhood and delaying marriage, and show the potential to transgress respectability norms. At the same time, the women attempt to recuperate these transgressions by deploying various capitals to reframe their new practices as respectable.

Finally chapter nine reflects on and summarizes the theoretical and empirical contributions of my thesis and reiterates my response to the research questions. It also

identifies the scope for further research that could expand and complement the findings of this research. Broadly, I argue that my conceptualization of the dialogical nature of new womanhood and respectability present an alternative image of Bangladeshi women, from that of the poor, oppressed and victimized 'third world' woman figure. More specifically, I argue that (re)doing respectable femininity enable new women to practice increased autonomy and agency. Although their gains are vested in the self, rather than a wider feminist politics, they have the potential to positively influence the terrain of possibilities for other Bangladeshi women.

Chapter 1: Conceptualizing Middle Class New Womenness: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Introduction

In this chapter, my concern is to explore both historical and contemporary constructions of the 'New Woman'. Discussions of the 'New Woman' can be traced to 19th century Western literature with the rise of activism around women's rights and suffrage. As I shall outline, the 'New Woman' challenged the separation of spheres and the predominant notion of women's role as the 'angel in the house'. Certainly the specific configuration of the 'New Woman' varies by time and space. Thus, in 19th century Britain, Victorian middle-class mores emphasized the importance of educating young women to be fit wives and mothers. Primarily the purpose of education for such young women was in 'accomplishments' such as music, drawing and singing in order to attract a suitable husband rather than finding jobs. 'New women', however, sought a more active role in the public sphere. During this time, in colonial India, middle-class 'new women' 'were positioned in opposition to British imperialism and as the site of ensuring the spiritual values of an Indian nationhood. In colonial Bengal the identities of new womenness and respectable femininity merged together. Similar to the Victorian angel in the house, colonial Bengali middle-class women, particularly Hindu women, were expected to use their education to serve the spiritual world of the home. But through their writing, many women, both Hindu and Muslim, participated actively in the nationalist movement to free India from imperialist power. But throughout all literature on the 'New Woman' it is recognized as a particularly middle-class phenomenon. In this sense, the issues that confront middle-class (and particularly upper middle-class) women in changing economic, social and political

conditions should be understood as related to the distinctions embodied in classed and gendered structures. In this thesis, I explore this by drawing particularly on the changing nature of respectability as a symbolic capital and lived practice through which ‘new womanhood’ in Bangladesh is enacted.

I begin by providing a linear historical discussion, moving from Britain to South Asia, of the conceptualization of new women and respectability. The discussion sketches out, as I have noted, how new women identities have always held within them an opposition to a 19th century British ideal of ‘angel in the house’. To manage this opposition, contemporary Indian literature identifies respectable new women who actively participate in paid employment in a neoliberal global economy, yet still prioritize their home and family above their careers, with limited scope of alternative practices (Talukdar and Linders, 2013; Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Mankekar, 1999). The Indian new women represent the nation and nationalism through their commitment to the family, while in Bangladesh the Bengali community takes precedence over the nation state, and women have to maintain the gendered social norms of their community through maintaining their role in the family (Sabur, 2010). Such ideologies can more broadly be understood within the oppositional states of women’s engagement in public and private spheres, and protection of the sexual moral order. However, a change is visible in limited research on Bangladeshi new women, both in the media and outside of it, where new women’s paid employment is being reconstructed as part of their respectability and contribution to class distinction (Karim, 2012; Azim, 2007).

As the historical literature, particularly in South Asia, has identified new womanhood as a middle-class phenomenon, in the final section of the chapter I provide a review

of how middle-class social structure is conceptualized in relation to social and cultural ideals in Bangladesh. In the context of globalization and neo-liberalization, the middle-class is increasingly becoming a focus of studies in South Asia. The middle class in the Indian subcontinent has seen a remarkable evolution since its emergence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Initially ‘setting itself apart as a “progressive”, “reformist” educated group (especially in Bengal, which was an integral part of the nationalist movement); the sub-continent’s middle-class generically created a “hegemonic” identity that continues to claim the representation of the common people’ (Karim, 2012:9). But following decolonization in 1947 and Bangladesh’s liberation in 1971, especially in the last few decades, neoliberalization and globalization have changed the South Asian and Bangladeshi middle class into a consumerist class, divided in its values and identities. Thus following Chatterjee (1989) and Baviskar and Ray (2011) I articulate the Bangladeshi middle class not only through income, values, cultures, lifestyles and education, but also through processes of urbanization, consumption, international mobility, exposure to global media and so on.

Constructions of New Women and Respectable Femininity: Past and Present

This section focuses on what the idea of new woman meant in Victorian narratives of British society, in colonial, post-colonial and neoliberal South Asia, and finally in Bangladesh. The review of new women literature illuminates the changing construction of respectable femininity as a symbol and practice of middle-class women in South Asia, particularly in relation to classed moral order and social change.

The Victorian New Woman

The 19th century Victorian 'New Woman' has been configured as a type, a symbol and a figure of feminist rebellion. Predominantly a journalistic phenomenon, a product of discourse, the 'New Woman' with her short haircut and practical dress, her demand for access to higher education, to vote and income rights, challenged the accepted views of femininity and female sexuality as docile and subservient. The New Woman was viewed as an ambiguous figure who triggered both anxiety and debate in Victorian Britain (Beetham and Heilmann, 2004:1). The concept was a somewhat semi-fictional one with some precise similarities with the lived experiences of the upper middle-class feminists of the late 19th century women's movements (Ledger, 1997:3). A particular class (male bourgeois) held power in society at the time and the semi-fictional ideological discourse of the new woman were promoted through journalistic avenues to encourage critics of New Woman to ridicule and to control the rebellious women (ibid:9). She was set in opposition to the 'pure' and 'traditional' identity of the Victorian woman, who was a nurturing wife, subordinate and dependent on her husband with strong emphasis on cultural purity, virtue, integrity and honour, which symbolized their respectability in society (Beetham and Heilmann, 2004).

Shapiro (1991) focused especially on the ways in which both satirists and social critics of the time mocked New Woman's mannish 'rational dress' of knickerbockers, Norfolk jackets, straw boaters and bloomers and their 'masculine behaviour' in role reversal fantasies of women 'popping the question' to men through marriage proposals. To the critics, the aristocratic and upper middle-class new woman was a symptom of the decadence and decline of social values. She rejected the sect of domestic womanhood, situating her as a threat to middle-class hegemony, to the

ideology of domestic space. In a gendered world organized by a strict dichotomy – angel in the house or fallen woman – New Womanhood was a position of slippage, a figure that represented political consciousness, professional identity and sexual freedom.

During the same period in New Zealand the New Woman presented herself in similar ways, dressed in rational dress, especially knickerbockers, and frequently riding a bicycle (Simpson, 2001). However, unlike in Britain, in New Zealand New Woman tried to reconcile their position with conventional beliefs about femininity to create alternative yet respectable identities (ibid.:54). Particularly when riding a bicycle, they employed a number of ‘protective’ strategies such as ignoring remarks from bystanders, riding in groups, avoiding certain streets and places where they might find themselves in vulnerable situations in relation to unwelcome attention etc. Thus there can be no single way of identifying the Victorian New Woman, other than the fact that she was the female figure of 19th century modernity (ibid.:72).

New Indian Women and Respectable Femininity

The ‘New Indian Women’ literature in colonial and postcolonial India represents new women as those who practised respectable femininity within the home and the public sphere, as opposed to the Victorian understanding of the new woman as a symbol of decadence. It is believed that through educational attainments the ‘New Indian Woman’ in colonial India was expected to acquire education and cultural refinement which would make her a worthy companion to her husband, but she would not lose her feminine spiritual (domestic) virtues or jeopardize her place in the home (Chatterjee, 1989:628; Gilbertson, 2011:119). New woman’s nationalism, femininity and middle-class morality were evident in her merits of *pativrata* (the perfect wife)

(Leslie 1989, in Gilbertson, 2011:118), merged with the Victorian image of the 'perfect lady' (Banerjee 2006: 78 in Gilbertson, 2011:118).

In colonial India (when Bangladesh was also a part of India) the nationalist idea of the middle-class Indian woman and her domestic virtue distinguished her from both Western culture and the 'traditional' or 'low class' India (Chatterjee, 1989). Colonial middle-class people were in the 'middle' of the classes and in the middle between colonialists and other Indians. In addition most of the middle-class Hindus were also high caste. Due to this combination of high caste and middle-class status they emphasized certain key values as a community, like scientific and rational education for men, and respectability for women, in relation to protecting the 'Indian tradition' of religious spirituality and family values within the home (Gilbertson, 2011:25).

During the early and mid-19th century the Indian nationalists split the domain of culture into two spheres – inner/outer which stood for the material and the spiritual, and sought to foster the material practice of modern Western civilization whilst retaining and often intensifying the spiritual practices of national culture (Chatterjee, 1993:120). Thus they constructed their own version of modernity, through the distinction between the material and the spiritual, which also took the form of a dichotomy between the outer world of men and the inner domestic world of women, much like the public-private divide in Western feminist studies. The inner, spiritual realm signified one's 'true identity', and women the representation of this identity. Colonial Bengali women's cultural identity was also valorized over Muslim religious identities. Bengali womanhood represented the modern nation and was pitted against lower-class veiled Muslim woman. Lower-class Muslim womanhood generated alarm and marked the growing '*Islamicisation*' of society (Azim, 2010).

However, through a reading of Muslim women's writings, Azim (2010) argued that Muslim middle-class women talked of nationalism in their writing and criticized the 'swadeshi' (Indian independence movement against the British Empire) movement for its evident dependence on Hindu symbols and themes (ibid.:136). Azim identifies these novelists as new women who used the notions of 'freedom' and private/public binary, often represented in terms of inside/outside, to express their growing desires to blur oppositional boundaries of private and public, and colonized and colonizers (Azim, 2002). She studies two female writers to demonstrate how both Hindu and Muslim new women aligned themselves with nationalist ideology. The Hindu writer, Swarnakumari Devi, exhibited that in the past Indian daughters were not confined within the home, but in colonial India they were, mainly to protect their identity as an Indian cultural symbol and wifely devotion from Western colonizers. Women's homes were geared towards the needs of this new woman, a site where all her desires and wishes could find expression (ibid.:399).

The Muslim writer, Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, is considered an iconic image of women's emancipation in 20th century colonial Bengal and is acknowledged as one of the feminist foremothers of Bangladesh. However, Hasan (2013) argues that Rokeya's work was in fact triply 'othered'-as a woman, a colonial subject and as a Muslim during an era when Hindu women writers took up the authoritarian role of writing Bengali women's history as opposed to Muslim women. Yet, Rokeya, was one of an array of women (others were primarily Hindu) who entered the literary public sphere, the social public sphere, and (by the early twentieth century) the political public sphere, becoming members of women's associations, writing in periodicals, and engaging in varieties of welfare work (Bagchi, 2010:53). Through her establishment of the central Indian Muslim Women's organisation, Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam,

she encouraged Bengali Muslim women to come out of their seclusion in the home and participate in organisational work for the betterment of their kind. However, the primary focus of Rokeya's activism was promotion of female education and accordingly Rokeya established her own girl's school in 1911 in Calcutta. In her anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal political allegories 'The Fruit of Knowledge' and 'The Fruit of Liberty', Rokeya made women's education the cornerstone of political freedom for India (Bagchi, 2009:748).

In her novels and writings Rokeya presented her ideas about women as actors in social and educational change, as teachers, activists, writers, and feminists breaking the public/private binary (ibid.). In one of her most famous novel *Padmarag* (The Ruby) she presents a group of women involved in a female-founded and female-led welfarist organisation. *Padmarag* shows fictionally how women from all religious backgrounds (Muslim, Hindu and a White British Christian woman) can built up social capital of trust, norms, and networks that facilitate social organisation and change – to create everyday practices for women's civil society work in education, harnessing their cultural and economic capital as educated *bhodromohila* (respectable woman) (ibid.:750). In *Sultana's Dream*, she portrays Sister Sara as someone 'who is proficient in modern branches of knowledge such as history, politics, military strategy, education and science' (Hasan, 2013:50). In the same story she describes a Utopian lady land where men were kept in seclusion and women ran all the affairs of the country. The story reflected her strong belief that women's emancipation and participation in all walks of life was not just an 'idle dream' for her but her strong call for women's release from seclusion within the home (Dil and Dil, 2014: 57).

Rokeya challenged three main forms of women's domination in colonial Bengal. Firstly, the most consistent image of women drawn by Rokeya was that of slaves under the patriarch of the household (husbands), denied of freedom of choice, and treated like an object by their husbands (Hossain, 1992:1). Rokeya drew parallels between iron shackles of slaves and golden chains that ornament women and asks them to resist the patriarchal system of households. Secondly, Rokeya critiqued the patriarchal, 'malestream' interpretation of Islam and re-examined it in light of gender justice, and did not take the prevalent patriarchal notions of Islam as its norm. Her call to Muslim men was to 'restore the actual teachings of Islam and to follow the Islamic principle of justice that ensures women's equal status in society. Such an approach earned her support and patronage from many Muslim intellectuals and political leaders' (Hasan, 2013:53). Finally, Rokeya both distanced and aligned with 'Western feminists'. She distanced her feminism from western feminists in relation to their ideas of sexual emancipation (Hasan, 2013). But she also depicted certain similarities between women everywhere to inspire a feeling of affinity between Muslim women and women of other countries, cultures and religions. She drew her readers' attention to the plight of Japanese women regarded as the 'first servant of her husband' (Hossain, 1992:3). Through including an English divorced women character in *Padmarag* she demonstrated how English women perceived to have more choice and freedom than Indian women in life are in fact at the mercy of male domination like their Indian counterpart. To address the social ills of the time like child marriage, women's lack of access to formal education, purdah and legal disabilities Rokeya took a feminist strategy of acquiring inspiration from women of the subcontinent or the Muslim world rather than relying on 'Western'/colonial solutions (Hasan, 2013: 56).

Post-colonial East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)

Although in postcolonial East Pakistan, the new woman discourse disappeared for some time, respectability literature emerged much more strongly. A middle-class initiative, the nationalist movement of Bangladesh, brought to the forefront the middle-class *bhdrolok* (respectable people) identity of the urban middle class community and protection of women's respectability was at the centre of this nationalist ideology (Kabeer, 1991). The liberal movements led by the Bengali *bhdrolok* in the 1950s expedited women's education, especially among Muslims. Subsequently, women started to join the public workforce in Pakistan around the 1950s, but were often limited to jobs such as teaching, and government positions in cities and urban spaces. Within two decades, professional women found their place in the middle-class social structure. However, women still had to create an enabling condition in the family, through starting nuclear families in cities,⁴ away from extended families in district towns thereby removing resistance of extended family members to allow them to work outside the home (Sabur, 2010:88). This transformation of the middle-class social system through women's education and professional careers in nuclear families as opposed to domestic women in joint families, marked these moral achievements as part of 'class behavior and signs of progressivism' (ibid.:88). And finally, it was this class of Bengali *bhdrolok* who eventually led the nationalist mass movement of independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

⁴ Jobs for both men and women were concentrated in the cities during this time. Although some men worked in cities while maintaining extended families in villages, soon most educated men's jobs in cities encouraged them to get into 'modern' life, defined by nuclear families in cities, as opposed to extended families in villages and towns (Sabur, 2010:88)

During the nationalist movement *Bengali* women became the symbol of the nationalist discourse and their respectable position was understood in their identity as *Bengali* women, as opposed to Muslim women. Bengali middle-class women's cultural practices, such as *bindis*,⁵ or singing Tagore's songs,⁶ came under attack by the Pakistani state as non-Islamic practices. The Bengali middle classes trained 'their daughters in arts such as singing, dancing and drama allowing them to perform in public', which were branded as Hindu practices by the Pakistani state and unacceptable in Muslim Pakistan (Ahmed, 1985:47; Kabeer, 1991:41). Their cultural practices marked the central grounds of Bangladesh's independence movement, which sought to establish a *secular fusion identity* which included aspects of their religion Islam, as well as their Bengali cultural practices, and it is this secular fusion identity that constituted Bengali middle-class women's respectability during this time.

Balancing Old and New Structures of Feminine Identity: Contemporary South Asian New Women and Respectable Femininity

Respectable New Women as Subjects

Several decades after India's independence from colonial rule and in economically liberalized India, particularly in the 1990s, a 'new' Indian woman has come into focus in the public realm. A substantial amount of research that address contemporary South Asian women's balance of old and new, tradition and modern and national and Western conceptualize these women as middle-class new women. Particularly in the postcolonial context of India, the country's ongoing struggle to reconcile notions of

⁵ A spot on the forehead, between the eyebrows, 'traditionally worn by Hindu women as a symbol of their marital status, but later adopted by Muslim and Hindu women as a cosmetic feature' (Kabeer, 1991:56).

⁶ Song written and composed by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who was a Bengali Hindu.

cosmopolitan Indian femininity and virtuous, submissive, deeply religious femininity have been visible in debates about beauty pageants (Talukdar and Linders, 2013; Parameswaran, 2004), consumerism in relation to beauty products (Reddy, 2006; Thapan, 2004) and light skinned film actresses (Osuri, 2008). These debates enable us to ask what kind of femininities are validated in contemporary South Asia. In this section I show how new womenness and respectability are part of this complex negotiation for legitimized femininities in South Asia today.

Radhakrishnan (2011) identifies the Indian new women as IT workers who are urban, upper caste, educated, English-speaking professionals, who identify with the symbolic and cultural identities of India's middle class and are bearers of nationalist, family and home centred Indian culture, yet, economically they are a segment of the global elite class (ibid.:8). They are 'at the frontline of the global economy, and assert their symbolic position at the helm of new India' (ibid.:5). While Talukdar and Linders (2013) identify new liberal Indian women as part of a modest segment of a 'new' middle class, who cannot be defined solely through material signs (e.g. income, wealth, work, education), but is new in terms of their distinctive social and political identity, which is an outcome of their close encounter with liberalization. The new Indian women belong to and help to define this new middle class in India (ibid.:108).

The normative conceptualization of middle-class respectability constructs stay at home mothers as respectable women in India (Radhakrishnan, 2009:204). But the professional new woman – who engages in the global economy of work and consumption, claims her high cultural and symbolic status through the 'assertiveness and autonomy afforded by her education and earnings', which must still be focused in the service of the family and the nation (Gilbertson, 2011:119; Radhakrishnan, 2009;

Mankekar 1999; Rajan 1993). The Indian new woman has also become a 'subject of capitalist desire as a consumer, as well as middle-class panic about changing sexual norms' (Radhakrishnan, 2011:50).

New Indian women distance themselves from other Indian and Western cultures in three distinct ways. Firstly, boundaries are drawn between 'aggressive' women, those who give up their families to fulfil career goals, and respectable women, those who are 'not so ambitious' and view a career as a supplement to married life and children (Radhakrishnan, 2011:149). But there are alternatives, where women make 'sacrifices' in the form of assuming the breadwinner role in families and use their economic power to compensate for their compromised position as the one who upholds family, which is a symbol of middle-class culture in India (ibid.:153). Secondly, new Indian women also distinguish themselves from upper-class Indians and their 'troubling' consumption patterns and materialism. Respectable middle-class women's consumption pattern is identified as a source of 'investing in themselves', 'enhancing one's comforts', and 'spending on your family' (Radhakrishnan, 2009:205). While getting a nicer fridge and a colour TV is crucial to status, impulse spending, for example on parties, in pubs, bars and on smoking undermine the symbolic capital of Indianness (ibid.:205). Finally, respectability is also related to rigid boundaries of women's sexuality, and pre-marital sex, pre-marital pregnancy and extra-marital affairs are deemed Western practices. The 'right' amount of freedom is evaluated through one's sexual and leisure behaviours which do not reject family values, thus do not cause loss of respectability (ibid.:206). Overall Radhakrishnan (2009, 2011) demonstrates that new Indian women define respectable femininity through practising the 'right' amount of freedom, which is not as little as either earlier

generations of Indian women, those less educated and less well-off Indians and those promiscuous upper-class Indians or sexually deviant Westerners (2009:211).

Other South Asian studies reveal similar boundaries of respectable femininity. For example, in Sri Lanka Fernando and Cohen's (2013) study demonstrates how boundaries of respectable femininity in public and private sector jobs, is evaluated through moral behaviour such as trying to excel in work, limiting acquaintances with male colleagues, not being seen with a man after office hours, maintaining physical and emotional distance from men, not staying out alone at night etc., which limits women's career progression. While in Nepal, Liechty (2003) demonstrated that middle-class women constantly distance themselves from prostitutes who are from lower classes and sexually available in the public sphere, as opposed to the middle-class women who are visible in the public sphere, but are still within the bounds of middle-class sexual propriety. Often, they also use the word 'prostitute' in stories about upper-class women whose assumed sexual activity challenges middle-class standards of respectability (ibid.:72).

However, even within this narrow group of respectable yet new women, there is diversity of practices and the boundaries that distance them from other women are often unstable and context specific. Radhakrishnan (2009) argues that while respectable femininity is rewarded, 'alternative femininities' are sanctioned. But she does not explain what are these 'alternative femininities' or how they are sanctioned (Fernando and Cohen, 2013:4). Nor does she consider the possibility of changing normative conceptions of respectability at the everyday interactional level in relation to aesthetic practices of clothing, marital relationships or women's overall status in society.

Respectable New Women as Objects in the Media

Another understanding of new woman comes from studies which examine the representation of new woman in the media. These studies depict the ‘new woman’ (both in the media and among the audience of these media representations) as an ‘object’, and their bodies as the surface upon which contradictory cultural messages are inscribed through a depiction of past and present, local and global, traditional and modern (Talukdar and Linders, 2013). Following Bourdieu, Talukdar and Linders (2013:103) claim that ‘new liberal Indian’ women use their bodies as a form of capital and distinction, constructing boundaries of gender and class position in society through practices of how they feed their bodies, how they clothe them, manage them and present them in public. While middle-class new women unanimously reject Western thinness norms, they still express body and appearance-related concerns in terms of finding a balance between the ‘horrible, vulgar and cheap’ bodies of fat women, who were also identified as lower class and termed as ‘distasteful’; and ‘bared bodies’ in Western style clothes which raised concerns of propriety (ibid:112). Thapan’s (2004) study of Indian women’s magazines demonstrates that magazines project new Indian women’s bodies as glamorous through their choice of consumer goods, yet emphasize that such a lifestyle can be achieved by Indian women who are status conscious, economically independent, capable of taking decisions, ‘modern’, and consciously middle class, thus expressing their Indianness (ibid:440). These messages indicate a complex system of agency, negotiation and self-definition among readers, who are predominantly middle-class Indian women.

However, Indian new women’s physical appearance, including body size, dress and make-up, is often condemned by their parents-in-law in India (Thapan, 2009). Since

middle-class working women's families do not have much control over the woman's time as they work outside the home, the in-laws often express their displeasure at how a woman eats, dresses or wears make-up to establish the norms of authentic Indian womanhood. But professional women have challenged such scrutiny by their families through holding jobs in the public sphere and dressing in non-traditional ways (ibid:129). Thus, new Indian women neither deny nor reject the conflicting notions of womanhood through appearance. Rather, through negotiation and strategizing, they practice multiple systems in the diverse locations of workplace and family (ibid:130). Similarly Liechty (2003) argues that in Nepal, middle-class professional women risk moral condemnation for their fashion practices. Requirements for formal Western dress in offices in Kathmandu creates controversy for middle-class 'office girls' who are identified as 'overly' fashionable, promiscuous and unrespectable (ibid.:81).

The Indian and Nepali literature indicates that there are a number of conflicting demands in terms of new women's bodily representation through aesthetic/clothing practices within the home and workplaces (Thapan, 2009; Liethcy, 2003). But this literature does not use any conceptual framework of aesthetics or embodiment practices in workplaces or differences between public/private aesthetic practices to analyse the various ways middle-class women negotiate with conflicting aesthetic norms of respectability and organizational aesthetic standards.

Contemporary Bangladesh: Changing Understanding of Respectable Femininity and New Womenness

Post-independence Bangladesh

The position and image of post-independence Bangladeshi middle-class women can be read through two conflicting dimensions. Firstly, in the 1970s official efforts to improve women's conditions remained trapped within the notion of maintaining women's moral propriety. The state turned its attention to the rehabilitation of women who had somehow slipped from their respectful place, targeting 'destitute women' (widowed or abandoned), 'war-affected women' (widows and rape victims) and 'socially handicapped women' (prostitutes). Kabeer (1991:47) argues that these were all women who had been displaced from the protective custody of the domestic sphere, establishing that women on their own deviated from the 'normal' order.

Secondly, during the same period there also emerged a group of 'enlightened', educated and 'empowered' women activists with access to resources and the voice of morality who wanted to 'save' the poor women, who were seemingly the victims of economic and social structures. The goals of these elite middle-class women activists were 'grounded in a certain idea of the "woman": she was the citizen of a newly independent country, where the tools of citizenship could be used to establish her identity, her rights, her social and political position' (Azim, 2007:2). Alongside NGOs and development agencies – especially those focused on women's economic empowerment – these middle-class activists were able to achieve effective results, primarily in reconstructing womanhood in relation to paid employment (ibid.:2). These women were neither identified as new women, nor respectable women, but positioned themselves in the middle somewhere.

Contemporary neoliberal literature on Bangladeshi middle-class women illuminates women's increased participation in the workforce as opposed to their historical confinement within the home (F. D. Chowdhury, 2009; 2010). However, it also highlights that the *samaj* or community, rather than the nation which endorsed 'foreign' practices in colonial (imperialist) and post-colonial (Islamic) times, is one of the most important aspects of middle-class women's respectability in the country (Karim, 2012:58). Thus the *samaj*, upholds the moral order of respectability in Bangladesh (ibid.:58). The Bengali community is a symbol of 'proper' living, a distinctively 'Bengali' lifestyle, as opposed to foreign or 'Western' ways (ibid.:59). Middle-class mothers play a central role in safeguarding honour and prestige and setting up and carrying out the ideal Bengali (or Bengali Muslim) way of life (ibid.:58–59). 'This is manifested in the way they bring up their children': which is neither like the elite nor the poor (ibid.:59; Blanchet 1996:31). As in India moral panic about middle-class sexuality and its use as a process of boundary marking is prevalent in urban Bangladesh. But the increasing presence and interaction of both genders in public spaces like education, work and recreation in the urban areas is generating relatively flexible social norms of gendered notions of respectability which may covertly challenge the older notions of middle-class respectability (ibid.:59).

Although women's occupations are widely accepted as part of their respectable middle-class position in urban Bangladesh, their familial roles are still expected to be their core identity. 'Often overeducated and successful single women are feared by potential grooms and their family given the perception that their autonomous stance can upset the balance of power in the household' (Sabur, 2010:136), thus threatening

masculine authority over women. When it comes to studies of new women in Bangladesh, Karim (2010:71) argues that urban middle-class women's education and professions provide them with the respectability and 'acceptability' to live their life 'in their own terms'. Her understanding of 'in their own terms' constitutes same-sex relationships of women, which is certainly against the moral boundaries of respectable femininity in Bangladesh or South Asia at large. Others like Parvez (2011), who does not use the concept of new women, claims that urban middle-class women's education and professions provide them with the opportunity to leave unhappy marriages and still maintain their respectability, whereas previously divorced women were highly stigmatized, socially excluded, harassed and faced difficulty in second marriage. Thus although middle-class respectable femininity in Bangladesh has some moral boundaries, recent research indicates that the accumulation of certain resources, such as education and a profession, provide new women with the agency and autonomy to construct their own version of respectable femininity.

Only Azim (2007) has systematically identified a community of new women in contemporary Bangladesh, rather than only touching upon new womenness and respectability when studying other practices of middle-class women like Karim (2010) and Parvez (2011). Azim argues that feminist concerns in Bangladesh have shifted from issues of citizenship, rights, identities and social and political space for women, to address the 'new' women of Bangladesh and their new and changing concerns. Bangladeshi new women are identified as relatively young urban women, who may be working or are students, and have visible presence in the public sphere. They embody and illuminate issues of sexuality, marriage and paid employment, rather than motherhood, children and housework, considered matters relevant for previous generations of women. The new women provide us with a picture of change and

transformation in gender relations in Bangladesh and how they themselves reframe the ‘cultural contours that surround them’ and negotiate with the new spaces they occupy today (ibid.).

New Women in Bangladeshi Media

In contemporary Bangladeshi media Begum (2008) provides a nuanced representation of new women and their transgression of society’s moral order. The new woman represented in Bangladeshi media, particularly television, is professional, ‘modern’, ‘bold’ and even ‘outrageous’. In terms of appearance the new woman in Bangladeshi media has short hair, wears the sari in a modern way,⁷ demonstrating her educated middle-class taste. Begum commends Bangladeshi media for accommodating non-traditional women characters in drama serials, at the same time she also identifies how the narrative of the dramas often depicts these women as a dark force, irrational, individualistic, and disobedient of elders slipping out of control. In the dramas the new woman behave outside the prevalent value system of joint families, engage in immoral consumerism, reject caring and nurturing roles, and dominate her husband. She is set in opposition to the ‘traditional’, subservient, ‘tamed’ housewife. Such representation of the ‘new woman’ is similar to the Victorian new woman who represented the fallen woman, thus not respectable, a contrast to the angel in the house image of ideal domestic womanhood, thus the respectable.

Alternatively, E. Chowdhury (2010) identifies the ‘new woman’ in Bangladeshi media as an agent of patriarchy, the development expert who provides services to the client

⁷ A saree can be draped in numerous styles. In the modern style most of the cloth is draped around the waist with a single segment going across the breasts and the left shoulder to cover the upper body. The midriff is left bare in this style of wearing a sari.

of development, the poor oppressed women of Bangladesh. The new woman in the telefilm studied is an urban, middle-class patron of development discourse, who is an 'efficient', 'skilled' and 'trained' development professional, whose (middle) class position allows her to transcend gendered vulnerabilities and assume the role of 'feminist saviour' rescuing the poor, rural, uneducated women who are victims of patriarchal system of society (ibid.:316). What is interesting is that the subject positions of these two women – saviour and victim – though incommensurable, depend on each other's existence, the former's subject position of patron relies on the latter's abject victimization (ibid.:309). Chowdhury argues that such a representation of new woman symbolizes her as an agent of neo-patriarchal relations among differentially located women and reflects a consensual (patron) and contractual (the one to be saved) structure of patriarchy, much like that between men and women.

Thus new women's representation in Bangladeshi media constructs them in binary opposition to other women in relation to modern, outrageous, and out of control vs. traditional, subservient and tamed (Begum, 2008) and consensual agents of patriarchy vs. victims of patriarchy in need of rescuing (E. Chowdhury, 2010).

Conceptualizing New Womanhood and Respectable Femininity

Drawing from the Indian and Bangladeshi literature (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Talukdar and Linders, 2013; Azim, 2007; Karim, 2012), I identify new womanhood as a symbol of change and continuity, and new women as agents who negotiate with various gender, cultural and religious norms that surround them within the changing society of South Asia, particularly Bangladesh. In so doing they are in a constant struggle to add value to their distinctive social status, which is different from previous generation of middle-class women, women of other classes and Western women. New

women's identity is a class privilege, which is used by them to simultaneously conform, negotiate and transgress boundaries of normative conceptions of respectable womanhood.

I draw from Skeggs (1997) to define respectability as a classed practice. To Skeggs (1997) respectability explains the complex relationship between gender and class. Studied as a classed gender practice based around particular types of femininity, aesthetics and caring, always trying to get something 'right', respectability is articulated as a process through which women add value to themselves. It is an important source of positive identity, and also an ideological form of self-persecution. It is a form of subjectivity, a position of struggle whereby women feel they are always being judged. In turn women also judge 'other' women, essentially trying to come out of their own struggle for respectability. The concept of respectability establishes social class as relational. It illuminates intra-class status distinction, as in Skeggs's study working-class women dis-identified with being working-class women, whom they considered uniformly 'rough' and 'undesirable', while they also did not accomplish middle-class status due to lack of access to resources (Watt, 2006:778). Overall, the notion of respectability illustrates reinforcement of fixed forms of class identities (upper class, middle class, working class) and the fluidity of personal agency as women position and identify themselves in relation to social structures within their class, thus intra-class status differences (Skeggs, 1997). I agree with Skeggs's conceptualization, and expand it to middle-class women. Skeggs argues that respectability is a concern for those who are seen to not have it; I argue that it is also a concern for those who are seen as being at risk of losing it, thus the middle-class new women of Bangladesh.

Throughout this research I draw heavily from the historical and contemporary literature on new womenness and respectable femininity. Particularly important are the works of Skeggs (1997), Radhakrishnan (2009, 2011), Talukdar and Linders (2013), Azim (2007) and Karim (2010, 2012). The historical literature on new women and respectable femininity suggests that both type of femininities are read as classed practices. They also illuminate boundaries of intra-class distinctions and inter-class distinctions (Skeggs, 1997; Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011), establishing class and gender identity as fluid and heterogeneous (Skeggs, 1997). I use the concept of new womenness as a form of middle-class progressive womanhood, as used by Victorian, colonial, post-colonial and neoliberal South Asian literature. To that I add the concept of respectable femininity to study the struggle of new women of Bangladesh to constantly maintain class distinctions, while at the same time introducing alternative forms of respectable femininities that provide them with a distinctive status, within their social class.

As class is central to the understanding of both types of femininities, in the next section I will elaborate on the existing literature on construction of middle class in Bangladesh.

Understanding the Neoliberal Middle Class in Bangladesh

The independence of Bangladesh reorganized its classes, whereby a salaried middle class took centre stage in the capital city, Dhaka, in the mission to rebuild the nation. In the late 1980s, Siddiqui (1990) constructed the middle class as agents (men) who were committed to the development and progress of the country. He identified an urban salaried middle class, whose family life was shaped by the non-agrarian

economy and exposure to Western ideas. He further identified a very small group of men who were brilliant young students and middle aged (aged between 35–45), successful professionals, many of whom studied abroad and were widely travelled, identified with some kind of activism, came from intellectual backgrounds, were culturally active and were raised in a ‘religio-moral’ atmosphere, valuing both religious and Bengali culture, rejecting communalism (Muslim-Hindu conflict) (ibid.:367). Due to their social and intellectual commitments, this group was identified as possible ‘agents of change’ of the country, where ‘change’ is defined as ‘reform’ and ‘revolution’ of political, economic and social aspects for the betterment of country’s people (ibid.:346). Siddiqui’s definition of middle class failed to address women’s role in this process.

Karim (2012) shifts the focus of class studies from just studying middle-class men to middle class women in Bangladesh; she also argues that middle-class status is mainly understood as a self-identified identity that one usually carries as part of family legacy. Income or economic bracket is often not enough to identify a person’s middle-class status, rather a person’s membership of a household determines his/her social privileges as opposed to the person’s individual income. For example, a single woman lives with her parents and is considered dependent on her parents. Her income is not counted as part of the household income. Thus although she may be part of an upper middle-class household, identifying herself as such, her personal income probably puts her way below upper middle-class status, although that is irrelevant for her (ibid.:12).

Karim (2012) and Sabur (2010) also discuss the emergence of a relatively affluent middle class in Dhaka. Broadly the yearly income bracket of an affluent middle-class household is between £6,600 and £9,900 plus, which is a combined income from

salary, small- or medium-sized businesses, earnings from land sales or real estate rents, or investment in the capital market (Rashid, 2012). Sabur (2010) identifies a certain 'lifestyle' and the 'transaction of various capitals', such as social networks, from one generation to another as the defining elements of the affluent middle class in the capital city of Dhaka. She gives various names to this affluent urban middle-class community, such as metropolitan middle class, transnational middle class, cosmopolitan class and finally the new elite (ibid.) Sabur recognizes that in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of this community in Bangladesh, certain social transformations, such as the global expansion of production, global consumption patterns, processes of liberalism, transnational mobility etc., need to be taken into consideration.

The affluent middle class consists of a group of professionals with higher education and asset accumulations from previous generations who share a set of core values (ibid.:105). This class consists of educated, salaried families where both husband and wife participate in income-generating activity and invest time and money in maintaining social relationships. Although men and women's dichotomous existence in the public-private sphere is becoming blurred among the affluent middle class, men are still considered the breadwinners of the family, and women's income is considered a supplement to that of men. Additionally, 60% of the women in Sabur's research fully participated in management of domestic tasks, such as arranging grocery shopping, food preparation, household help etc. despite having a job. The other 40% shared the roles of household head making financial and domestic decisions together with their husbands (ibid.:101).

There are four vital aspects of the constitution of affluent middle class. Firstly, education is a major status symbol of this class, as it is almost impossible to become

a professional without a university education. However, in recent times education has also come to mean decisions about the medium of education – English or Bengali – as well as educational institutes which are all associated with class aspirations. English-medium schools and reputed educational institutes, expensive as they may be, are a status symbol of affluent middle-class families in Bangladesh (ibid.:95). Secondly, occupation is one of the defining characteristics of the salaried middle class. The annual salary scale of the affluent middle class ranges from £3,096 to £7,224 plus per earning member (ibid.:98). Thus in dual earner families, annual household income can range from £6,192 to £14,448 plus. Along with the salary, inherited property and other forms of fixed or liquid assets constitute the economic capital of this particular class. ‘These accumulations are transmitted across generations and provide agents with the leverage to attain essential cultural and social capital and to sustain a particular lifestyle’ (ibid.:97).

Third comes domesticity and consumption patterns, where women’s roles become most prominent. Following Bourdieu’s (1992) idea of ‘taste’ and ‘habitus’, Sabur (2010) identifies the domestic space as a ‘place where tastes of a class are formed, nurtured and aimed towards a particular lifestyle’ (ibid.:101). Today women’s exposure to global lifestyle cultures through work or media, introduce new consumption habits to the family, such as eating out, socializing in cafes, regular visits to beauty salons and gymnasiums etc. Sabur argues that these values and tastes not only shape the middle-class lifestyle, but also establish their boundaries from other classes (ibid.:102). Finally the middle-class community invests money, effort and energy to sustain social relationships with friends, family, colleagues, voluntary political or social groups they are involved with. Socializing take place over occasional

visits, and attending social events, such as birthdays, marriages, funerals and parties (ibid.:102–105).

Drawing on Karim (2012) and Sabur (2010) I identify the new women of Bangladesh as part of this affluent middle class and find it useful to analyse new women's classed identity of respectability in Bourdieusian terms, conceived in terms of possession of capitals, development of 'taste', through habitus and field and the process of acquiring distinction and status.

I turn to these issues in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Conceptualizing Middle-class New Womenness: Class, Boundary Work, and (Re)doing Respectable Femininity

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the literature on the ‘new woman’, highlighting how the middle-class ‘new woman’ represents a challenge to the ways that respectable femininity is bounded within the divisions, variable across time and space, of the public and private. The new woman represents moments of actual or potential change in how respectability is not only configured in symbolic ways as prescient of change, but how it is enacted as an everyday practice. I have also provided an outline of the emergence of an affluent urban middle-class in Bangladesh, who are bearers of cultural norms of the country, maintaining the society’s moral order, yet participate in modern and global lifestyles through consumer culture. As I outline in this chapter, and throughout this thesis, the ‘doing’ of new womanhood represents an important site to consider how classed gendered norms adapt and change and, of course, how they are less malleable than the discourse of ‘newness’ implies.

The analytic framework that I bring to this draws on feminist critiques of Bourdieu’s (1992, 2008) understanding of capitals and distinction. Bourdieu provides us with four forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) and he presents a competitive account of social relations as capitals are accumulated, traded or lost (Skeggs, 1997). In so doing Bourdieu stresses the importance of the material realm of social relations and provides a strong focus on everyday life. This may be the way we dress, our leisure activities, the wine and food we consume or our broader dispositions such as our gait and the way we carry ourselves.

Following Moi (1991), feminists have appropriated Bourdieu through a critical appraisal of the usefulness of his theories to feminist enquiry. Of note feminists have raised concerns not only about the absence of attention to gender in his work, but also how Bourdieu's approach is caught within objectivist conceptions which limit the capacity for agency and reflexive awareness. They have pointed to how women's gender and class identity take different meanings, particularly in the field of workplaces, and can constitute status differences within the dominant class (Lovell, 2004). In this research, I will explore women's struggles to add value to themselves whilst navigating the conflicting demands of gender and class in the field of organizations through the concept of aesthetic labour (Warhurst et al, 2000; Witz, et al, 2003).

In developing these perspectives, central to my conceptual framework is an analysis of conformation, negotiation and transgression of normative understandings of middle-class respectability in Bangladesh. Such a conceptualization can help evaluate how the identity of new womanhood is constructed, reconstructed and performed through (re)doing the classed gender identity of respectable femininity, in relation to boundaries and binaries of respectable identities (West and Zimmerman, 2009). This reconstruction of and performative aspects of respectability is key to studying new womanhoods in Bangladesh and in this thesis I identify those areas of change and continuity that are challenging hitherto normative conceptions of Bengali middle-class womanhood in Bangladesh.

This chapter is organized into four interrelated sections. First, I provide an understanding of class through Bourdieu's framework of capitals and distinction. Through elaborating on feminist critiques of Bourdieu's framework I establish gender

and class as fluid identities, and recognize women's agency and reflexivity in construction of class and status. Second, I use West and Zimmerman's (1991, 2009) social constructionist framework to add a performative stance to the concept of respectable femininity. Third, I elaborate on boundary work as a continuous ongoing process, able to create inter-group and intra-group distinctions. Finally, I develop a three-part analytical framework to evaluate the construction of new womanhood through (re)doing of respectable femininity. The chapter concludes with the research questions of this thesis.

Constructing Social Class through Capitals and Distinction

Skeggs (1997) uses Bourdieu's (1992, 2008) metaphors of capital as a general theoretical framework to understand respectability, and the intersections of gender and class in subjective production. Bourdieu's model of class is based on 'capital' movements through social space. The structure of class position is determined through the distribution of various forms of 'capitals' which are capable of conferring strength, power and profit on their holder (Skeggs, 1997:8). Thus capital is a set of common properties, objectified or sometimes legally guaranteed (such as possession of a good) or a set of embodied practices such as clothing (Bourdieu, 1992:101; Bourdieu, 2008: 280). Bourdieu treats capital and power as synonymous and claims that it determines the position of social agents in social hierarchy. To Bourdieu there are four different types of capitals. The first is *economic capital*, which is 'immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights' (Bourdieu, 2008:281), such as income, wealth, monetary assets, financial inheritances etc. Second is *cultural capital* which is 'convertible on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational

qualifications' (ibid.:281). Cultural capital can exist in three forms: an embodied state like clothing; an objectified state such as paintings, and finally an institutionalized state, such as educational attainment which has institutional recognition. The third type of capital is *social capital*, 'made of social obligations (connections), which is convertible in certain conditions into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of nobility' (ibid.:281). Finally Bourdieu also presents *symbolic capital*, which is the form any other kind of capital (economic, cultural and social) can take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. This process of legitimization is a key mechanism in the conversion of symbolic capital (Skeggs, 1997:8), such as prestige and respectability. Legitimation occurs when one's privileged taste and capitals are considered part of one's 'natural' capacity, misrecognizing all others as inferior and reproducing dominance of the privileged. Bourdieu recognizes the most important aspect of capitals is their ability to be converted into another form of capital, and especially into economic capital. He also considers economic and cultural capitals to be the 'two main active or constructing' properties in social power relations (Laberge, 1995).

Bourdieu's idea of 'taste' and 'habitus' is also useful in understanding how classed distinction is produced. Habitus is a 'socialized subjectivity', the embodiment of a set of 'material and objective determinations' in addition to 'the structure of social relations that generate and give significance to individual likes (tastes) and dislikes in relation to practice and action' (Laberge, 1995:136). The relationship between two capacities defines the habitus, 'the capacity to produce classifiable practice and work,'⁸ and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste),

⁸ Here 'classifiable' denotes both ordering and defining the classes.

that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life style, is constructed (field)’ (Bourdieu 1992:170). Bourdieu maintains that distinction and distancing produce social class: through taste and distancing from working-class and upper-class features the middle-class classify themselves into a social system of distinctive features which are perceived as expressions of their particular class condition. Thus the Bourdieusian formula argues that all distinctive/classed lifestyles are defined by the mutual relationship of habitus, capital and the field. The distinctive ‘taste’ of the class is derived from its agents’ ‘homogeneous conditions of existence (field), production of homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar properties...and practices (capital) ...within a set of common properties embodied as class habitus’ (ibid.:101). Derived from this relationship of capitals, habitus, field and taste are social tools that define and mark off the high from the low, the appropriate from the inappropriate, and the ‘respectable’ from the ‘not-respectable’. By such an understanding of social class it appears that the *structure* of class has power over individuals’ subjective *agency* to negotiate or challenge class norms, such as respectability.

Feminist Critiques of Bourdieu: Women as Subjects

Bourdieu’s theories have been especially useful for feminist scholars seeking to bring class back on to the agenda. But his theories are overtly structural and feminists have emphasized the need to add more agency to his account. There are three aspects of feminist critique of Bourdieu’s theorization which are useful for this research. First, Bourdieu sees gender as a form of symbolic capital and middle and upper-class women as ‘sign bearing carriers of taste’ who exhibit classed taste and respectability (Skeggs, 2004a:22–28). However, feminist analysis has revealed that women can be subjects

with capital-accumulating strategies of their own rather than just capital-bearing objects (Lovell, 2000; Skeggs, 1997, 2004a; Reay, 1998). Feminist scholars have shown how gender struggles over taste (e.g. feminine appearance through clothing practices) have come to define contemporary understandings of classed taste in many societies, including the formation of respectable femininities (Skeggs, 1997). Skeggs (1997, 2004a) demonstrated that women can produce authorization at an individual level by taking a different perspective and revaluing the valueless position they are expected to occupy. In her research, working-class women who were de-valued gave themselves value through the practice of respectability. Their version of respectability was defined in opposition to the middle-class. These women were not taking on the views of the dominated nor the dominant, but engaged in ‘an entire reworking of perspective and value’ (2004a:25). This demonstrated that gender habitus is not pre-reflexive or unconscious, and recognizes the ambivalent and nuanced practices of the dominated to capture subjecthood, in this case women, wanting to change and adapt with an ability to add value to themselves. Thus femininity is agential, heterogeneous and fluid subjectivities within a social class (Skeggs, 1997) which helps acknowledge that women can construct inter-class and intra-class status differences. I agree with such understandings of feminist studies and maintain that women’s *agency* in accruing capitals can affect *structural differences* and women’s individual classed gender identity of respectability in various societies.

Secondly, although Bourdieu draws from Weber (1978) to conceptualize understandings of class, when studying class status he distances himself from Weber’s specific formulation of articulating class and status as opposites. While Bourdieu suggests an invariable relationship between class and status, thus economic position

and lifestyle,⁹ to Weber status, defined by lifestyle, may coincide with class, but they are otherwise in ‘sharp opposition’ (ibid.:509). Thus propertied and property-less people may belong to the same status group, as at certain times, an economically weak element may exercise considerable influence and power because of its preeminent (historical) status. Following Weber, feminists have argued for construction of ‘women’ as a gender *class*, constituted through the social relations of domestic production and sexuality, rather than participation in the labour market (Lovell, 2004:46). Thus ‘while working-class women are full members of *both* the working-class, and the subordinate *gender* class, “bourgeois” women who do not have “bourgeois” positions in the labour market are classed only through their gender, and they share their *gender* class, of course, with their working-class sisters’ (ibid.:46). But bourgeoisie women such as wives and daughters of capitalists and the secretaries of powerful men may exercise status power (rather than class power) over other women, where ‘status order’ is structured by them (ibid.:46). I agree with such understanding that middle-class new women’s ‘gender class’ positions them in a constant struggle to gain value and legitimacy, thus status power, through respectability, to be able to ‘order status structure’ and distance themselves from other women.

Finally, Bourdieu’s analysis omits the workplace as a field within which embodied capital is developed and mobilized in a struggle for development of classed gender identities (Witz et al, 2003). The concept of aesthetic labour explains classed workplace aesthetic norms in relation to clothing practices, thus cultural capital.

⁹ Drawing from Weber, Bourdieu sees life-style as ‘stylization of life’, ‘a systematic commitment which orients and organizes the most diverse practices-the choice of a vintage [wine] or a cheese or the decoration of a holiday home in the country’ (Bourdieu, 1992:55-56).

Coined by Warhurst et al (2000) and further theorized by Witz et al (2003), aesthetic labour refers to the management's overt utilization of the workers' embodied competencies and skills to produce a 'style' of service encounter in organizations. Aesthetic labour is a tool to extract value from workers' embodied qualities, which includes 'corporeal cues of class written on the body' (Mears, 2014:1334). However, feminist researchers have argued that women themselves constitute their class position (habitus) in various fields (workplace) (Lovell, 2000). Thus women can consciously change or adapt their aesthetic cultural capital, and use it as an asset in the labour market, transferable for economic or even symbolic capital to gain value (Ross-Smith and Huppertz, 2010). In this research I will use aesthetic labour to explore the complex and nuanced processes through which new women construct respectability through adding value to their embodied cultural capital of clothing practices, in the field of workplace.

(Re)doing Classed Gender: the Performative Aspect of Respectable Femininity

To analyse women's performative and subjective power in negotiating respectability, I draw from West and Zimmerman's (1991) argument that gender (and class) is not something we are, but something we do. Identifying classed gender behaviour as a 'doing' helps expand the notion of respectable femininity from a symbol of class to a classed practice. West and Zimmerman (1991) and West and Fenstermaker (1995) argued that both gender and class are achieved properties, continually socially reconstructed in light of normative conceptions/ accountability structures¹⁰ of appropriate attitudes and activities of a man or a woman through being accountable to

¹⁰ In this research I will use normative conceptions and accountability structure as interchangeable terms.

popular notions of what a person of a certain class should 'look like' or 'act like'. Gender and class are fluid and interactional. Thus people act in various ways, conforming, negotiating and resisting normative conceptions of gender and class, with the awareness that they will be judged according to what is deemed appropriate classed feminine or masculine behaviour. And finally gender and class are also forms of situated conduct, which can be modified or transformed as the occasion demands (West and Zimmerman, 1991:22). The issue is not conformity or deviance, rather the possibility of an action being evaluated in relation to normative conceptions of gender (and class) and the consequence of that evaluation in an interaction (West and Fenstermaker, 1995:21).

Thus micro situations are where gender and class come to exist. In relation to doing class, Collins (2000) notes that *behaviours, tastes, and values* are socially defined as appropriate and expected for a given socioeconomic position, and constitute the accountability structure of a social class. The recognition that class is produced and reproduced in micro level interactions also raises possibilities of self-conscious *management* of taste and behaviour, responding to accountability structures. In her study of women's interaction in a coffee shop, Yodanis (2006) claims that women segregated themselves into distinct groups through finding similarity or differences in their behaviours, tastes and values of feminine understanding of work, family and leisure activities. She claims that in the coffee shop objective criteria of class, such as occupation, income and wealth, were neither necessary nor sufficient for class categorization, rather class became an outcome of performances and interaction and an ongoing struggle for class status by *all* (both working-class and upper-class, each trying to categorize themselves as superior to the other) (ibid.:364).

However, such an interactional and situational understanding of doing gender and class focuses on individual interactions, rather than the institutional and structural contexts within which these interactions are located (Charles, 2014). Most research using the doing gender concept used it to evaluate conformation or resistance of gender (more common than class), which neither challenged the underlying power hierarchies between men and women nor categorical distinctions between masculinity and femininity (ibid.:369). Ultimately the gender binary remained reasserted as women either conformed to ‘appropriate’ femininity or acted in masculine ways, expanding the range of meaning associated with doing femininity. Subsequently some researchers used undoing gender to explore the link between structural changes and social interaction (Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009).

West and Zimmerman’s (2009) reconceptualization of ‘doing’ to ‘redoing’ establishes gender and all other axes of social relations as interactional *and* institutional/structural. They emphasize that the ‘oppressive character of gender rests not just on difference but the inferences from and the consequences of those differences’ (ibid.:117). This implies that changes in circumstances under which difference is understood and evaluated can facilitate shifts in terms of gender accountability, and weaken the ground of men’s hegemony. However the term ‘undoing’ implies abandonment – that sex category is no longer something individuals are accountable for. They see the concept of ‘undoing gender’ as a process of reading multiple femininities and masculinities. Particularly in relation to Deutsch and Risman’s understandings of undoing gender ‘undoing’ only recognizes a shift in accountability structures, but not abandonment. Thus to West and Zimmerman (2009) ‘gender is not *undone* so much as *redone*’ or in other words done differently and in multiple ways (ibid.:118). Redoing does not mean that individuals can bring about change in the normative order of gender, or in

institutional or structural practices to which they are held accountable (Connell, 2010; Charles, 2014), it only establishes instances of doing gender differently and in multiple ways, acknowledging the structures within which these doings take place.

In this research, the redoing framework helps interrogate social change. Historical and structural circumstances (accountability structures) are the background against which gender is established and enacted. Social change may shift accountability structures to accommodate ‘less oppressive ways of doing gender’, disrupting the normative conceptions of classed gender identities, opening up an opportunity to redo gender by expanding the ways of doing gender (Connell, 2010:32; West and Zimmerman, 2009). Such an approach recognizes gender (and class) identities as ‘procedural, emergent, dynamic, partial and fragmented in nature’ (Garcia and Welter, 2011:386). But identity construction is always embedded in various structures which influence redoing gender in various contexts such as within family and workplaces. And people’s understanding of accountability structures are also influenced by their different exposures to media, education etc., which influence their redoing (ibid.).

Connell (2010) uses the redoing concept to recognize how trans people develop a hybrid gender identity at workplaces combining feminine and masculine attributes. However, despite trans people’s commitment to hybrid gender performances, they are held accountable to gender expectations by their clients at workplaces (ibid.:44), thus they are unable to change the accountability structures of gender. Although Connell does not address class directly in her study, she suggests that as her sample consists of white, middle-class trans people only, studying poor trans people may reveal further varieties of responding to doing gender, thus accountability structure, by virtue of their position in the class hierarchy (ibid.:53). Charles (2014) demonstrates that due to long

and arduous feminist campaigns, the National Assembly of Wales introduced family friendly measures at work. These include, limiting working hours to 17:30 pm and the assembly sitting only during school terms. By holding masculine workplace roles women challenge normative conceptions of doing gender, but also reinstate them by embracing essentially feminine ways of work, thus redoing gender (ibid.:377). Through the process of redoing, women essentially try to add value to alternative forms of femininity (Garcia and Welter, 2011), rather than assuming masculinity.

Following these conceptualizations, I propose a model of middle-class respectable femininity in Bangladesh, whereby the construction of classed respectability is constitutive of various capitals women maintain, accrue and reinvest in the family to legitimize their dominant class position. Capitals and taste offer a conceptualization of respectable femininity as a constitutive element of ‘symbolically authorized middle-classness’ (Radhakrishanan, 2009:200). Particularly important for this research is respectable femininity’s association with women’s changing roles within the family, in relation to reinforcing class privilege through capital accrual, conversion and legitimation and maintaining the public-private life balance and propriety which constitute critical forms of symbolic capital of respectability. I then expand this symbolic understanding of respectable femininity to *not just a symbolic capital* imposed on women by their class structure, but also a *(re)doing or practice* of women. I identify Bangladesh’s entry into the neoliberal global economy and the acceptability of women’s increased participation in paid employment as the changing social structure within which new women conform, negotiate and transgress classed gender norms of respectability. To avoid overly agential interpretation of the term redoing, I will use parenthesis, such as (re)doing, to clarify its use to signify multiple and heterogeneous doing of respectable femininity in a changing society. Conceptualizing

respectable femininity as both a symbolic capital and a practice helps understand situations where differences and hierarchies are not so straightforward, and boundaries of social hierarchies are continually constructed and reconstructed by individuals in various ways, responding to social change and accountability structures. Respectable femininity is then a discursively produced category and a site of struggle and contestation for new women.

Boundary Work in (Re)doing Respectable Femininity

In the historical and contemporary literature on new women and respectable femininity, discussed in the last chapter, binaries and boundaries of classed construction of respectability took centre stage. In understanding the construction and performance of respectable femininity as a capital and practice, which can create, maintain, contest and introduce alternative forms (not oppositional) of distinction and differentiation of respectability, the processes of negotiation and boundary work can be of use. I will draw on Pereira's (2010) conceptualization of the metaphor of 'negotiation' beyond just construction and contestation. Drawing from the word 'negotiation's' Latin etymology *neg* which translates as 'not', and *otium*, 'leisure' or rest, which literally means 'there is no leisure', Pereira proposes to use the word negotiation as 'no rest'. Such an understanding helps to underline the fact that negotiation is continuous and never complete, and also that it demands boundary work (ibid.:27). She links this continuous process of negotiation with the everyday and ongoing display, performance and accomplishment of boundary work, which is a 'toil' and 'labour'. I find Pereira's (2010) understanding of boundary work as an everyday and ongoing labour useful to understand how respectability is used by middle-class women to perform continuous boundary work to negotiate with various binaries.

Binaries represent fixed and oppositional positions, which operate as boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Hughes, 2003:141). Boundaries can be ‘fiercely political’, however, subjects are sites of ‘political struggle’. Through studying subjects and their struggles in challenging dominant discourses of binaries and introducing multiple identifications, it is possible to unpack the oppositional politics of binary positions, recognizing connections between oppositions through evaluating sameness and difference (ibid.). The concept of boundary work helps evaluate how the boundaries of binary construction of respectability are negotiated by individuals in their everyday interactions.

Southerton (2002:175) defines boundary work as ‘the process of becoming included (belonging)...therefore the active maintenance and negotiation with others (whether imagined or in practice) of guiding frameworks for inclusion’. He explains that boundaries not only mark the beginning and end of a community, they also mark ways in which members of a community want to be distinguished (ibid.:175). Lamont (1992) defines boundary work as personal investment in identity ‘an intrinsic part of the process of constituting the self; they (boundaries) emerge when we try to define who we are: we constantly draw inferences concerning our similarities to, and differences from, others, indirectly producing typification systems’ (ibid.:11). Lamont’s acknowledgement of ‘typification systems’ indicates that boundary work guides and organizes both the self and other social identities into categories. She provides a systematic relationship between boundaries and categories. In her study of French and US upper middle-class men and how they related to others, Lamont showed three primary frames to measure social status. First, *socio-economic* frameworks judged through wealth, power and professional success; second, *cultural* frameworks, which emphasized intelligence, manners and taste; third, *moral*

frameworks, focusing on personal characteristics such as honesty, work ethic and personal integrity. Lamont's frameworks resonate with Bourdieu's various capitals: the socio-economic framework corresponds to economic capitals, cultural frameworks resonate with cultural capital and moral frameworks resonate with the symbolic capital of respectability. However, when it comes to distinction, Lamont claims that Bourdieu's understanding of distinction assumes that people with similar tastes and capitals tend to stay together, contributing to the reproduction of class structure. Differentiation does not always mean hierarchical relations. Some boundaries are weak, and thus we need to recognize that individuals do not always draw boundaries out of their habitus and taste, rather societal factors, such as geographic mobility, can also influence individual ways of drawing boundaries differently than the rest of the group members of their class (ibid.:115, 147). Such an understanding of boundary work resonates with Weber's (1978) and Lovell's (2004) understanding of intra-class status difference.

Through a study of a Southern English new town, Southerton (2002:190) claims that although boundaries drawn through the generic social category of class were visible, identifications were often asymmetrical and there were internal differences in frameworks of evaluating status within a social class. Similarly for Skeggs (1997:161), women (working-class) born in structures of inequality and differed capital which circumscribe their social movement, use their capitals to perform respectability, creating intra-class status differences, but 'barely influence the supra-local arenas' for social movement through 'capital exchange and conferral of legitimacy'.

One of the most fundamental markers of class is exclusion through constant boundary work which is closely related to accrued capitals. However, while generic categories

can be identified, this boundary work is varied in its practice from one individual to another. In the process of studying accrual and conversion of capitals, and forms of exclusion, the diversity of practices and experiences within the group must also be recognized. This recognition of how the diversity of boundary work practices enable women to construct their identity of respectability differently and in multiple ways, thus (re)doing respectability to claim distinctive status, is one of the main themes of this research.

Conceptual Framework of Respectable Femininity and New Womenness

In this research I conceptualize respectable femininity as a symbolic capital, as well as a defining practice of new women's distinctive class position, introducing alternative forms of respectability, in contemporary Bangladesh. Rather than viewing class as an external material structure existing prior to and outside of gendered everyday life, I use a social constructionist approach of doing and redoing classed gender, thus respectability, which prescribes certain behaviours and practices of femininity to women of a particular class. I seek to explore to what extent normative conceptions of Bengali middle-class respectable femininity have changed due to neoliberalism and women's increased participation in paid employment. I also want to explore if middle-class women (re)do respectable femininity, thus if they conform, negotiate and transgress permeable and shifting boundaries of Bengali middle-class respectability. Such an approach grants primacy to multiple systems of social difference, in this case gender and class, which have been overlooked in studies that use a doing gender framework (Pyke and Johnson, 2003). I also locate respectable femininity as central to how new women understand the world they live in, the social, economic and cultural capitals they deploy, and how they interact with and present

themselves to others. This highlights how (re)doing respectability is the foundation on which the status for new women is constructed.

Following this literature review I propose a three-part analysis of the construction of new womanhood through capital accrual, maintenance, conversion, legitimization, and doing and (re)doing of respectable femininity. In all the stages of the framework, boundary work remains a significant characteristic of respectability and new womanhood.

- 1. Capital accrual, conversion, deployment and legitimation:** To explore the construction of class privilege and distinction of new women I use Bourdieu's (1992; 2008) economic metaphors of capitals. Capitals are useful for understanding how access, resources and legitimation contribute to formation of classed distinctions, and particularly in this research the focus is on middle-class differentiation. Following feminist work on the subjective construction of class (Skeggs, 1997; Lovell, 2000) I explore how new women accrue, convert and deploy various forms of capitals and ascribe different tastes and values to socioeconomic positions. Such practices of women mark the processes through which boundaries of inter-class and intra-class distinctions are maintained, and enable us to identify the interests and benefits of particular groups (Moi, 1991). Skeggs (2004a) has shown that once legitimized, middle-class respectable femininity becomes a capital that women seek to embody to gain symbolic profit. Following Radhakrishnan (2009, 2011) I construct respectability as a symbolic capital. In India respectable femininity is an embodiment of family and national culture, which provides new women with status and self-worth as part of their dominant class position. In this research I

expand this notion by arguing that capital investment and legitimation authorizes new women's middle-classness, which they seek to embody to gain symbolic profit enabling inequalities in capital to be reproduced through status distinctions. I explore various capitals: economic capital – such as professions; cultural capital – such as aesthetic practices, education, and work-home balance; social capital – such as attending and hosting family functions; and symbolic capital – good daughterhood and daughter-in-lawhood to demonstrate how respectable femininity becomes an embodiment of middle-class dominance – a symbolic capital that serves the primary symbol of new womanhood.

2. **(Re)doing respectability:** I draw on West and Zimmerman's (1991) and West and Fenstermaker's (1995) conceptualization of doing gender and class and West and Zimmerman's (2009) reconceptualization of redoing gender to evaluate how accountability structures of respectability can shift to accommodate alternative ways of doing respectable femininity, but are never entirely eradicated. In so doing I assess how women conform, negotiate and transgress the boundaries of middle-class respectable femininity in Bangladesh. The concept of (re)doing helps me understand the construction of respectability as culturally, economically and historically situated and changing across time and space. Meanwhile conformation, negotiation and transgression to these normative conceptions help me to identify sites of context-specific alternative femininities. Such alternative forms of respectable femininity negotiate the boundaries of binary oppositions to dominant notions of middle-class respectable and unrespectable femininity. I also draw from Pereira's (2010) conceptualization of negotiation as continuous and never

complete and Southerton’s (2002) conceptualization of nuanced boundary work by those within a group, to identify the doing of respectability as a dynamic process, constantly reproduced by people acting upon their representation of it in different contexts and interactions. I explore how neoliberal transition of Bangladeshi society effects the *permeability* of the boundaries of respectability in the country. I use the social constructionist approach of (re)doing to identify how moments of actual or potential change in how respectable femininity is symbolically constructed is prescient of change in how it is enacted as a practice. Thus I explore how respectability and new womanhood are in a constant dialogical process to influence each other.

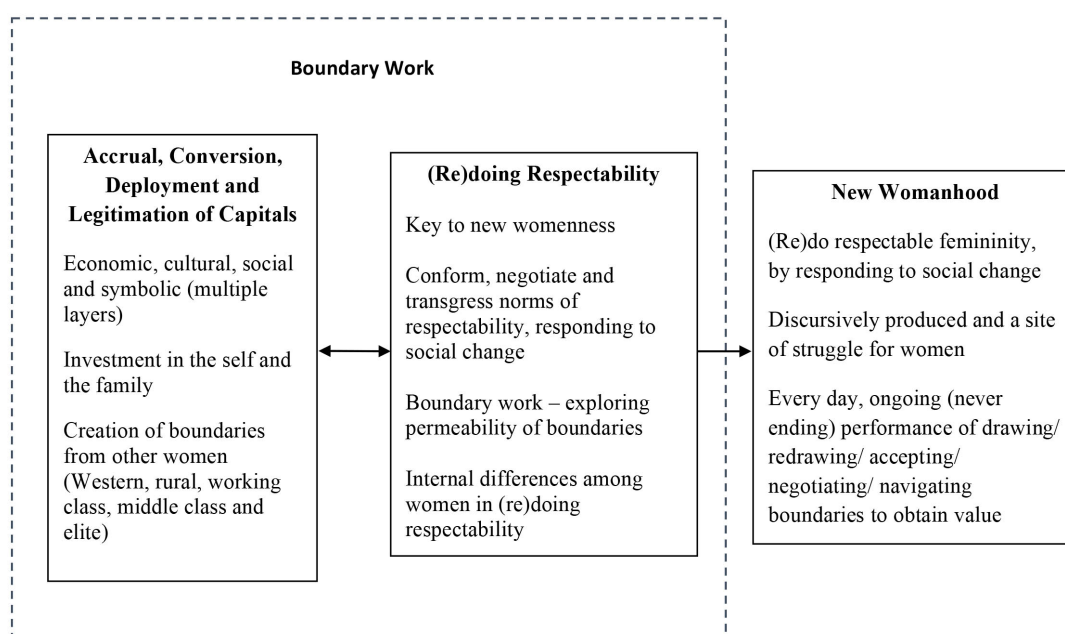


Figure 2.1: (Re)doing respectability and becoming a new woman

Research Questions

Following my proposed framework my overall research question is:

- How does being respectable impact ‘new womanness’ and how do new women subject positions contribute to an understanding of normative conceptions of middle-class respectable femininity in Bangladesh?

In responding to the overall thesis question the research questions proceeded as follows in respect of the different stages of the research:

Preliminary Stage:

1. Do participants identify as the new women of Bangladesh? How is she configured from their standpoints and to what extent do participants conform to their notion of new women?

Stage-1:

2. How do the new women (re)do respectable femininity in contemporary Bangladesh?
 - a. How do the new women (re)do respectable femininity in the context of workplaces?
 - b. How do the new women (re)do respectable femininity in the context of the family?

Stage-2:

3. To what extent are the new women of Bangladesh transgressing norms of middle-class respectable femininity and how?

In the next chapter I explain how I carried out this research and how each stage of the research informed the research questions (reflected through stages above) making this research an inductive and iterative one.

Chapter 3: The Bangladeshi Context: Women's Progress in the Country

Introduction

This chapter provides relevant contextual information about Bangladesh and its women. Such contextual discussion has implications for understanding the target sample of the research, research methodologies (discussed in the previous chapter) and interpretation of findings (to be followed in consequent chapters). The Bangladesh Government is committed to attaining the objective of the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in conformity with the fundamental rights enshrined for women in the Bangladeshi Constitution. The Government has also adopted the National Policy for Women's Advancement (2011) and a series of programs for ensuring sustainable development of women in the country. Consequently, the recent CEDAW Report (People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2011) and MDG's Bangladesh Progress Report 2013 (Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014) claim that the country has made notable progress in achieving gender parity in schools, increasing women's participation in paid employment and governance. In UNDP's Gender Development Index¹¹ (GDI) (2013) Bangladesh's rank is 107 out of 187 countries, which is an improvement of 16 places from the 1999 index, above most South Asian countries like Pakistan and Nepal and only below Sri Lanka and India.

¹¹ Based on distribution of wealth and well-being as opposed to traditional measures based on income.

I start the chapter by explaining the political and economic situation of the country, addressing how these affect Bangladeshi women's status through economic reforms and policy level changes. I then move on to study macro level statistical data on women's progress in accordance with MDGs in the areas of education, paid employment and political participation. I am able to show that although MDGs in the field of women's education have already been met in Bangladesh, and women have also made considerable progress in employment and politics, overall women's progress in these areas is broadly inconsistent. Throughout these two sections I also highlight how a large number of women working in the service sector of Bangladesh remain outside any research on Bangladeshi women's progress. Finally, I elaborate on how globalization and neoliberalism effect Bangladeshi women's paid employment and class status, particularly in urban areas.

National Politics, Economy and Women of Bangladesh

Bangladesh has historically been part of the Indian sub-continent and was under British rule until partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. After partition the country became part of Pakistan, known as East Pakistan. The country gained independence from Pakistan in 1971 after a nine-month liberation war. Bangladesh has a population of 149.8 million (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011), and is one of the world's most densely populated countries. The sex ratio of the population has been improving consistently, and the 2011 population census recorded 74.8 million women and 75.0 million men in the country, claiming to have reached equality in the sex ratio with negligible difference (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012a:9). The majority of the people are Muslim, 88.3%, other religious communities consist of 10.5% Hindu; 0.6% Buddhist and 0.3% Christian. The majority of the population, 98.8%, speak Bangla,

the national language, and the rest of the population from Bihari and tribal backgrounds speak in their ethnic languages (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013b; Population Statistics, 2004). English, however, is widely spoken by the urban middle and upper-class populations.

Bangladesh's political situation has historically been highly turbulent. After the independence of the country in 1971, the first two presidents of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and General Ziaur Rahman, were assassinated in military coups in 1975 and 1981 respectively. Consequently, General Ershad assumed the role of president, and his military government suspended political parties and the constitution. Islam became the state religion (in its original constitution Bangladesh was identified as a secular country) to seek support from oil-rich Islamic nations. After mass protests, Ershad stepped down in 1990, he was later convicted and jailed for corruption and illegal possession of weapons. Since then Bangladeshi politics has been dominated by two parties. Bangladesh National Party (BNP) led by Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of President Ziaur Rahman, and Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (BBC, 2015). Bangladesh's politics has been identified as a 'dysfunctional two party system' in which the two party leaders wage a personal vendetta at the country's expense (Banyan, 2015). The only other political party with influence in the country is Jamaat-e Islam, the Islamic platform currently in coalition with BNP.



Image 3.1: Two political party leaders from left Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. Source: <http://www.madhyamam.com/en/node/17332> [Accessed 23/03/2015]

Ethnic and religious turbulence is another characteristic of Bangladeshi politics. In 2012 a government tribunal started investigating war crimes and the alleged collaboration of Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islam with Pakistan during the 1971 independence struggle. Thousands of protestors took a strong stance in favour of the trials and young women's resilient faces and powerful voices through slogans and chants marked the initial days of the protest. The protests caused increased violence by the Jamaat-e Islam rioters all over Bangladesh, attacking minority communities of Hindus and Buddhists. They also attacked and killed secular bloggers who wrote in favour of the war crimes trial, and charged women protestors with accusations of immorality and sexually deviant behaviour on the protest ground. Since then several leaders of Jamaat-e Islam were convicted and the death sentence of one of Jamaat-e Islam leaders was carried out. Today, ongoing political uncertainty, frequent general strikes and associated hostilities are leading Bangladesh's economy to move into an unstable phase.

Bangladesh is identified as one of the 'Next Eleven Tier' of developing countries, with high potential for becoming the world's largest economies in the 21st century (BBC, 2014). With a history of an agrarian economy, and a stable service sector, since the late 1980s due to trade liberalization Bangladesh has been diversifying its economy with a focus on industrial development in manufacturing and the energy sector (BBC, 2014). In the World Bank's year 2013's Gross Domestic Products (GDP) ranking Bangladesh is ranked 58 out of 192 countries. Amongst the South Asian countries, Bangladesh is ranked only below India and Pakistan, and above all other countries in the region like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan (World Bank, 2013). Bangladesh's GDP growth rate in the year 2015 is 6.2%, which is above the estimated growth rate of South Asian countries (6.1%) and developing countries (4.8%). Bangladesh's GDP growth rate is only below India and Sri Lanka, and above all other South Asian countries (World Bank, 2013).

The Economy of Bangladesh can be classified into three sectors: agriculture, service and industry (manufacturing and construction). The average contribution of the service sector, industry sector, and agriculture sector to the GDP are 49.33%, 28.42% and 22.42% respectively (Islam et al, 2012:178). The growth rate of the industry sector, service sector and agriculture sector are 7.49%, 6.17%, 3.21% respectively (ibid.:180). Thus the service sector and agricultural sector contribute the most to the country's economy, while the service sector and industry sector are growing at a faster rate than the agricultural sector. The primary field of manufacturing is the Ready Made Garment Industry (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. The RMG sector has been a key contributor to Bangladesh's strong economic performance and to women's empowerment through paid employment in urban Bangladesh. But this industry is now at a critical crossroads, as a recent high-fatality factory fire (Tazreen Fashions fire)

and a building collapse (Rana Plaza factory building collapse) in 2013, have exposed the hazards workers face and also severely tarnished the industry's image in relation to safety measures in garment factories.



Image 3.2: Bangladeshi women working in agricultural field. Source: <http://nimg.sulekha.com/others/thumbnaillfull/bangladesh-agriculture-2009-2-11-7-35-22.jpg> [Accessed 24/03/2015]



Image 3.3: Bangladeshi women working in RMG sector (The World Bank, 2013:2)

The service sector in Bangladesh has consistently made a steady contribution to the country's economy. The sector includes areas such as government, mass media, telecommunication, information technology, financial services (banking, insurance), education, NGOs and civil society, retail, health care and hospitals, legal services, consulting etc. The liberalization of the Bangladeshi economy influenced growth of the service sector, especially the telecommunication and financial sectors. The service sector is increasingly becoming the core of the Bangladeshi economy. In the context of South Asia, where growth of the service sector has been fluctuating in the last decade, Bangladesh and India have been the only exceptions, with consistent growth in their service sectors (Islam et al, 2012). It has created a great scope for employment in Bangladesh. The total percentages of employment in the agriculture, service and industry sectors are: 58.89%, 25.36% and 12.39% respectively (ibid.:181). For males, the highest is 41.11% engaged in the service sector, followed by 40.18% in agriculture and 19.60% in industry. For females, the highest is 68.84% engaged in the agriculture sector followed by 21.89% in the service sector and 13.32% in the industry sector (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2010:46).



Image 3.4: Bangladeshi women's professional workshop in service sector. Source: <http://bdwomensme.org/> [Accessed 22/04/2015]



Image 3.5: Women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh. Source: <http://futurestartup.com/2014/03/08/stories-of-6-bangladeshi-woman-entrepreneurs-inspiring-change/> [Accessed 22/03/2015]

Image 4.5 presents the top six women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh in 2014. All of their entrepreneurial initiatives are in the service sector or industry sector and more importantly in the neoliberal sectors, such as IT and textiles. From top left, Taslima Miji is the CEO of Techmania which provides hardware and software services; Bibi Russell runs her own fashion house, Bibi Products, selling indigenous Bengali weaver's craft to the world; Ivy Huq Russell is the Managing Director of Maya which provides women access to information (health, cooking household etc.) and a shared community through a website and mobile phone apps; Samira Zuberi Himika is the Managing Director of Team Engine which provides communication and campaigning services; Sabila Enun runs DCastalia providing web design and communication services; finally, Selima Ahmed is president and founder of the Bangladesh Women

Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI), which represents the interests and supports the initiatives of women entrepreneurs. It appears that women's entrepreneurial activities in the country reflect the statistical data, that the service sector is the second largest sector of women's labour force participation in the country, particularly for educated middle-class women of the country.

Under the leadership of two women prime ministers, Bangladesh has made notable changes in women's progress. Most recently the Bangladesh Government has approved the 'Women Development Policy 2011'. It ensures 'equal rights of men and women' in family, society, and workplaces. Additionally it ensures women's full control over their earned property, credit, land, inheritance, and market management, 33% representation of women in various political organizations and abolition of all discrimination against women and contradictory provisions against the CEDAW charter (Shamsie, 2011). The Bangladeshi Government has also given recognition to intersex or transgender people as a third gender in its constitution in 2013 (Chowdhury, 2014). Following this discussion, it is worth looking at the MDGs to get a more detailed understanding of women's progress in Bangladesh in education, employment and political participation.

Macro Level Progress Narratives of Bangladeshi Women based on MDGs

Building on the United Nations (UN) global conferences of the 1990s, the United Nations Millennium Declaration 2000 marked a strong commitment to the right to development, and to gender equality, among many other dimensions of poverty reduction and sustainable human development. The available data suggests that the MDGs of achieving universal primary education for all and promoting gender equality

and empowering women through eradicating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015 has almost been met by the country in 2011. In terms of enrolment of primary school age children into schools, the country is well on track for the MDG target as the net enrolment ratio in 2013 was 97.3%, for girls the rate was 98.2% and boys 96.2% (Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014:41). The Literacy Assessment Survey (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013a) found that in 2011 female literacy (adults aged 15 years and over) in the country was 49.2% and the literacy rate for men was 56.8% men, higher than women. This has increased from 18 per 100 women in 1981 to 49.2 in 2011, while for men from 39.7% to 56.8%. Thus historic data reveals women's literacy rate has improved at a higher rate than men in the country. The following graph demonstrates the higher rate at which women's literacy has improved as opposed to men.

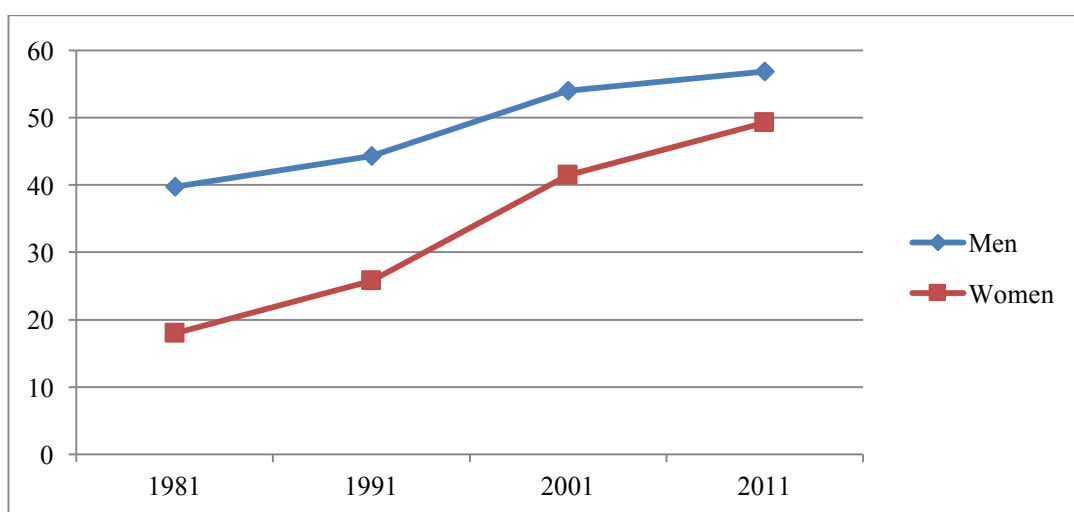


Figure 3.1: Adult literacy rate of population aged 15+ by sex, 1981– 2011
(Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012a:94)

Although not part of the MDGs, but as the participants of this research have university degrees it is worth mentioning that number of women completing higher education

has also increased particularly since 2001. The following table demonstrates that women's participation in public and private university education more than quadrupled in eight years from 2001 to 2009.

Year	Number of girls in universities
2001	29806
2002	32685
2003	33607
2004	42294
2005	49867
2006	66842
2007	92984
2008	93638
2009	131113

Table 3.1: Women's university education in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Bureau Statistics, 2012a: 104)

However, the MDG's educational target and indicators do not address some salient aspects of quality, context and equity, in issues such as measuring attendance, participation, completion, gender norms, qualification of teachers etc. (Unterhalter, 2014). An Asian Development Bank (ADB) study reports that, although girls outnumber boys in enrollment in primary and secondary schools in Bangladesh, girls' attendance is poor and their performance in terms of knowledge and skills are also lower than the boys, particularly in secondary schools. Girls also have a high dropout rate at the secondary level, which may be due to worries of sexual harassment in schools, practices of sex role stereotypes in texts and teaching practices, which position girls and women within the household, fewer women teachers and families' reluctance to spend on private tuition for girls (ADB, 2010).

The next indicator of promoting gender equality in the MDGs is in the area of wage employment. For Bangladesh the focus is on increasing women's share of wage employment outside agriculture to 50%. At the national level women's participation in formal waged employment remains fairly low, only 1 out of 5 women are employed in non-agricultural sectors (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014:16). But for the population aged 15 years and over, women's participation in waged employment has more than tripled in the last two decades. Men's labour force has increased from 30.6 million in 1996 to 39.5 million in 2010, while women's labour force increased from 5.4 million to 17.2 million in the same period (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012a:63).

Women's labour force composition (in percentage of total labour force) has increased from a mere 5.7% in 1981, to 39.3% in 1990-1991, with a drop to 21.1% in 1999-2000 and picked up again in 2010 at 29.6% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012b:91). The drop in the late 1990s was caused by the phase out of World Trade organization's Multi Fiber Agreement (MDA) 1974-2005 which resulted in pay cuts and layoffs in garment sector work where 85% of the employees are women. Particularly in urban areas, where majority of the service sector jobs are concentrated and from where the participants of this research are selected, women's labour force participation has witnessed a steady increase. In 1981 urban women's labour force composition in percentage of total labour force was 6% which increases to 24.1% in 1990-1991 due to neo-liberal turn of the nation, then to 26.5% in 1999-2000 and finally 29.3% in 2010 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012b:91).

I have already demonstrated that women's participation in the labour force can be divided into three broad areas: agriculture, industry and service sector. The following

table presents distribution of female employed persons by industry in percent (number of female employees in each sector per 100 employees).¹² The data shows that in the last 10 years women's participation in agriculture has decreased slightly, while both industry and service sector participation has increased. Industry sector increased from 11.59% in 2006 to 13.17% in 2010, and service sector from 19.5% in 2006 to 21.7% in 2010 (ILO, 2013:22).

Major Industry	1995-96	1999-2000	2002-2003	2006	2010
Agriculture Forestry & Fisheries	27.80	46.20	58.70	68.30	64.84
Industry-Manufacturing and Construction	26.80	19.00	18.30	11.59	13.17
Service Sector	46.00	34.90	23.20	19.50	21.70

Table 3.2: Distribution of female employed persons by industry, 1996–2010 (percent) (data compiled by author from ILO, 2013:22 and Labour Force Survey, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2010)

Thus the MDG of increasing women's wage employment outside the agricultural sector to 50% has not been met as at 2010, rather it has been fluctuating. Although women's participation in industry and service sectors increased slightly in recent years, in the long run they have been fluctuating inconsistently as well. An ILO (2013) report concludes that women's employment in the service sector is increasing due to a decline in employment in agriculture, stigma associated with factory jobs and the reluctance of women to accept factory jobs. Women's increased enrolment in education and a rise in household expenses, motivate them to take jobs in the service

¹² There is slight discrepancy in the data represented in table 4.1 which is collected from ILO's report, as opposed to the Labour Force Survey report discussed previously. This is mainly due to the fact that ILO provides a clearer presentation of sector-wise breakdown of employee distribution by gender.

sector, which helps Bangladeshi women achieve upward mobility in relation to income and expenditure. In addition, growth of neoliberal service sectors like finance, telecommunication, mass media, education etc. creates opportunities for employment that fit urban educated middle-class women's skills and preferences; and increases their participation in the labour market (ibid.:1). However, despite a notable increase in women's participation in paid work (in all sectors), ILO reports that the burden of women's domestic duties, lack of formal childcare facilities, poor working conditions, harassment and assault at the workplace, insecurity, especially on the way to or from work, discourage women to take up paid employment (ibid.:42).

The third indicator of the MDG is increasing women's participation in government, particularly through the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. At the national level, of 350 seats, 50 seats are reserved for women, in addition to the 300 open seats that women can contest. Women in the 50 reserved seats are appointed, rather than elected, on the basis of different political parties' representation in the parliament. In 1986, only 5 women were elected in the 300 contested parliamentary seats, which came down to 4 in 1991 election. In 1996 the number of elected seats increased slightly to 11, but it declined to 6 in the 2001 election. In 2008 the total number of women elected in the parliament was the highest – 20, and in the subsequent elections during 2009, 2010 and 2011 the number of elected women was 19, which was the second highest number in 38 years since the 1973 election (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012a:119). It appears women's participation in the parliamentary election for general seats has fluctuated in different periods. Figure 4.2 presents this fluctuating number.

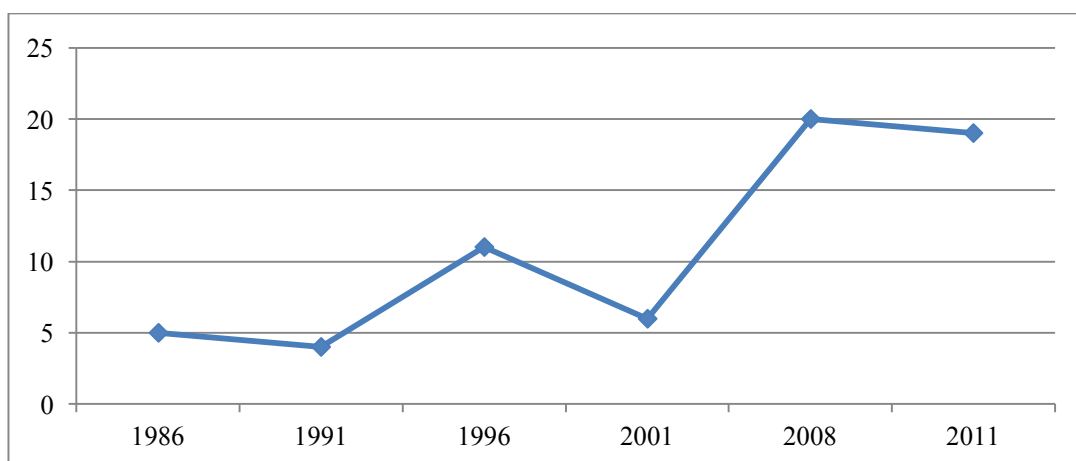


Figure 3.2: Number of elected women in contested parliamentary seats (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012:119).

At the local government level, one third of the seats are reserved for women. In 1997, electoral provision for election of women to reserved seats was introduced in local government (Union Parishad), where positions were previously appointed by the ruling political party. Women can also compete for non-reserved seats and the position of local government chairs. The number of women being elected as local government chairs in 2008 was very low at only 0.47%, while women's participation in elected local government seats was relatively high – 25.26% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012a:120). The low rate of women's participation in government has been identified as due to uncooperative behaviour of male colleagues, and lack of opportunities to participate in higher-level decision-making in local government. While at the national level, reserved seats for women are often taken by those who have a political family connection, thus there is widespread debate about this system of reserved seats for women and many women's organizations have been advocating that women should be elected to the reserved seats and the number of reserved seats should increase to 100 (ADB, 2010:55–56).

Although the numeric data reviewed above is not organized according to class, it appears that overall women's progress in education is remarkable. Participation in the labour force and governance is still quite inconsistent. But there is historical evidence that women's participation in service sector jobs has been the second highest proportion, above the industry sector. However, women employees of the service sector have remained outside any research on women's labour force participation in Bangladesh. As the service sector's upward trend in Bangladesh has been identified as being due to the emergence of modern neoliberal industries in the country, in the next section I will elaborate on the influence of globalization and neoliberal moves of the country and its contribution in changing women's position in Bangladesh.

Effect of Globalization and Neoliberal Shifts on Bangladeshi Women

Globalization and neoliberal economies have had two significant effect on Bangladeshi women. First, in introducing the modernist development discourse through NGOs of poor women's empowerment through the market. Neoliberalism as an ideology rests on the idea that human welfare is best served by the withdrawal of the state from welfarist policies (Harvey, 2005: 64). Following this ideology Karim (2008) claims that in Bangladesh non-state actors such as NGOs use new technologies of market-oriented disciplinary mechanisms who encourage their clients to act according to the values of 'discipline, efficiency and competitiveness'. It also refers to governance by NGOs that have begun to act like a state, and they seek to implement social engineering programs such as population control, HIV/AIDS management, primary education, voter education, etc. as well as poor and rural women's access new routes of capital circulation through micro-credit policies of NGOs in Bangladesh (ibid.:7).

Micro-credit is the extension of small loans to women for income-generating projects and poverty alleviation. Neoliberal and capitalist ideologies of this credit program can be analysed in four ways. First, micro-credit recipients of NGOs have become consumers of products of multinational corporations such as finance capital, breeder chickens, cell phones, and as producers, they remain dependent on multinational corporations for physical inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and pesticides (Karim, 2008:8). Second, individual microcredit establishes women as the out-of-the-home worker, isolates women as individual entrepreneurs and introduces competition, self-interest, and individualism, all of which are characteristic of market driven neoliberal society (Karim, 2001:101). Such a capitalist ethic is against wage labour, overtime pay, retirement benefits and worker's compensation, i.e. against the very foundations of a welfare state. Third, neoliberalism and globalization through NGO activities serve as a catalyst of social justice for women. Given the dominance of NGOs over rural populations, national political parties also seek the alliance of NGOs in order to win elections. Many NGOs have aggressively sponsored their female members for village-level local elections, posing a challenge to the rural patriarchal power structure (Karim, 2001: 99). Thus it can be said that NGOs are reterritorializing rural subjects as new subjects of a market-driven democratization (Karim, 2008:12)

Finally, micro-credit policies have also shifted the discourse of poverty to a discourse of neoliberalism at the local level. The concept of 'poor people' is now seen as a negative identity in rural Bangladesh. Previously, the poor felt a claim on the wealth of the rich because they were in a patron–client relationship. Thus in times of hardship, the poor could forage on the lands and ponds of the rich for sustenance. Similarly, the

rural rich would make claims on the free labour and adherence of the poor in exchange. This traditional patron–client relationship has weakened, and has been replaced by a neoliberal discourse of self-help and individual responsibility (ibid.:14). To conclude, as neoliberalism and globalization operate at the grassroots through the micro-credit policies of NGOs, they have tremendous power to regulate people’s behaviour, and subject them to NGO mandates and priorities creating neoliberal subjects who act according to market driven mechanisms to come out of poverty (Karim, 2008, 2001).

Secondly, globalization and neoliberal economies have had ‘transformative’ implications for women’s paid work. In Bangladesh, trade liberalization has been associated with a significant expansion of women’s paid employment in a context where they previously had limited access to such opportunities (Kabeer, 1997; 2008). Large numbers of poor women now have access to the casual and poorly paid labour market, such as RMG or entrepreneurial work through microcredit, while educated middle-class women have expanded their share of managerial jobs (Kabeer, 2008). More research is available on poor women’s empowerment through paid employment than for middle-class women in Bangladesh. Although microcredit may not provide ‘automatic’ empowerment of women, it constitutes an entry point into the larger project of poverty reduction and empowerment, transforming women’s position in Bangladeshi society through economic productivity, social wellbeing and empowerment (Kabeer, 2005:4709; 1999). In the case of urban poor, Kabeer and Mahmud (2004) claim that due to a neoliberal move of Bangladeshi state in the 1980s, there was an almost overnight creation of first generation female RMG workers in Bangladesh during the time. It is noted that the comparatively higher wage of the RMG sector than informal sectors of work such as domestic help, and the respect that came with the profession provided many RMG workers with increased power to manage

their own income, concealing components of income such as overtime to save for future etc. (Kabeer, 1997:281). But these women still practised ‘non-decisionmaking’ as their increased decision-making power is accomplished in hiding from their husbands, who still do not recognize that women can or should have more decision-making power.

Some research and news items identify a booming middle-class community in Bangladesh, who are economically affluent, engaged in the global consumer market and exercise transnational mobility (Sabur, 2010; Karim, 2012; Rashid, 2012; Sadique, 2013). Although 31.5% of Bangladesh’s population still live below the poverty line (Government of People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2014:41), in the last decade the middle class has nearly doubled to approximately 30 million, more than the populations of Sweden, Norway and Denmark combined (Sadique, 2013). During this same period, the incomes of the middle class have doubled too, increasing Bangladesh’s private consumption to nearly £66 billion every year (ibid). The income bracket of these neoliberal middle-class households is between £6,600 and £9,900, which is a combined income from salary, small or medium-sized businesses, earnings from land sales or real estate rents, or investment in the capital market (Rashid, 2012). In terms of middle-class women, the recent five-year development plan of the state between 2011 and 2015 emphasized women’s participation in managerial jobs. Bangladesh’s economy is going through a form of deflation and high cost of living, which encouraged women’s participation in the labour force to maintain and improve urban middle-class lifestyles, social status and the overall economy of the country (Sultana, 2014). Thus in recent years many middle-class women are entering managerial level jobs in a variety of organizations such as telecommunication industries, banking, IT, media, educational institutes, beauty industry, healthcare, non-

governmental organizations etc. (ibid). However, there is little research available on the impact of neoliberal movements of the country on this rising middle-class community's women.

Thus it is important to ask to what extent women, *all women* rather than just rural and urban poor women, have benefited from effects of globalization and neoliberalization, and what this implies in relation to improving women's position in Bangladeshi society.

Conclusion

Despite the long history of Bengal's middle-class women's active role in the country's nationalist and political movements, they have remained outside most research on contemporary Bangladesh. The country has been going through an economic transition since the 1990s, witnessing a shift in its economy from agriculture to service and industry sectors. Although agriculture still employs the highest proportion of Bangladeshis, the industry sector is growing at the fastest rate and the service sector has been a stable source of employment for both men and women in the country. Women's employment in general has more than tripled in the last two decades. But the urban working women's various negotiations to improve their position in society has only been researched from the perspective of the poor women, particularly in RMG sector. This may be due to the feminized nature of work in this sector where 80% of the workers are women (World Bank, 2013). However, in the overall scheme of paid employment, the RMG sector actually employs the smallest proportion of female workers in the country. Research on the changing lives of women and empowerment related issues of mobility, decision-making, household power

dynamics etc. also focus on poor women. Some studies on women's paid work by Siddiqui (2000), Kabeer (2001), Kabeer and Mahmud (2004) etc. show that women in Bangladesh are not only pushed into the labour market because of worsening economic conditions, but also because they are responding to new economic opportunities, and expressing their own demand for paid work. But whether middle-class women in the neoliberal service sector are able to demand such changes and how they do so remains unknown. Under this context, I set out to explore urban affluent-middle-class women, specifically in the capital city of Dhaka to evaluate their micro level negotiations at workplaces, within the home and society at large.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter details the methodological choices that I made to examine my research questions, and the key issues and dilemmas that emerged from the process. I start with a discussion of how I draw from feminist ideas to frame my research and then I elaborate on my research plan. I explain my methodology and methods in three stages, following the sequence in which they actually transpired in the research process. In the preliminary stage, I planned and started my field work in Dhaka, negotiating issues of access, sampling and conducting a focus group discussion. This is the lengthiest section of this chapter as I not only discuss my access and sampling techniques, but also describe the sample participants, their characteristics, how I named them for this research, the sampling technique for visual materials (advertisements), their purpose in this research and the focus group discussion. In the first stage, I conducted in-depth interviews with 21 participants (four of whom were also part of the focus group); in this stage I also started transcribing and translating the focus group data and the interviews. In stage two, I conducted the second phase of electronic or telephone interviews and data analysis. I discuss the iterative nature of this research, and elaborate the complex process through which the theoretical framework and research questions of the thesis changed in order to address participants' understanding of the concept of new womanhood. I end the chapter with a discussion of ethics and power, explaining how I handled issues of my insider status, reflexivity and rapport in this research.

A Feminist Approach to Research

I draw from varied understandings of feminist research, as a framework for my study. Feminist methodological debates reflect feminism's political developments. Feminist research has developed various core concepts, such as 'standpoint', 'situated knowledge', 'strong objectivity', 'feminist empiricism', 'intersectionality' and 'reflexivity' (Harstock, 1983; Collins 1986; Haraway, 1988; Crenshaw, 1989; Harding, 2002; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Smith, 1997; Hughes, 2013). It started with the call to do 'feminist' research, defined by women, with women and about feminist issues, that emphasized two key terms, situated knower and situated knowledge. The situated knower 'generate(s), and argue(s) for, knowledge arising out of the perspectives that come through the social location of the knower' (Hughes, 2013:xxv). And situated knowledge 'rejects epistemological approaches that presume that the subjectivity and experiences of the knower are inconsequential' (ibid.:xxv), thus situated knowledge highlights the importance of learning from multiple perspectives and taking seriously the accounts of the subjugated/subject. Such understandings developed feminist methodologies, such as standpoint theory. Drawing on Marxist epistemology, feminist standpoint argued for women's knowledge to have epistemic privilege as women stand outside the governing relations of power (ibid.:xxv).

However postmodernism, postcolonialism, queer and identity theorists have critiqued standpoint theory and the notion of situated knower, due to its construction of 'woman' as a universal category, essentializing womanhood as ahistorical, unchanging, and common to all (Hughes, 2013:vii). The relevance of multiple identity positions and how they intersect leads to the development of intersectionality as a methodological focus (Crenshaw, 1989), defined as 'the relationships among multiple dimensions and

modalities of social relations and subject formations' (McCall, 2005:1771). Intersectionality uses woman as the core concept of difference, but uses additional multiple categorical differences such as 'race', class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion etc. to create a complex methodology of analysis. Particularly relevant for this research is Mohanty et al's (1991:333) critique of Western feminist writing that produces the 'third world woman' as a singular monolithic subject, represented in Western feminist discourses as poor, tradition-bound, uneducated, ignorant, family-oriented, domestic, sexually constrained and victimized; and the self-representation of the Western woman as modern, educated, free and in control of their bodies and sexualities (ibid.:334–337). Contrary to such hegemonic analysis of non-Western women, recognition of complex and multiple identities of women in relation to gender, 'race', class, ethnicity allow for analysis of 'multiple and hybrid forms of selfhoods' (Hughes, 2013:xi). This also raises feminist consciousness of reflexivity of the researcher. Reflexivity is 'the ways in which our portrayals of social realities simultaneously describe and constitute realities' (Miller, 1997:25). It recognizes how the knowledge produced is located in the perspectives of the researcher, and it also gives 'a warning about objectivity of the account, by indicating the role of subjectively located knowledges' (Hughes, 2002:167).

Furthermore, feminists have problematized and challenged empirical 'objectivity' achieved through quantitative methods and positivism which historically posits the knower or the researcher as having authority over others. Such a masculine way of knowing is challenged with arguments in favour of reflexivity, and acknowledgement that 'reality is rooted in social activity and knowledge is constructed by humans' (Hughes, 2013:viii). Therefore, feminists have been concerned to develop ways in which scientific knowledge can proceed through methodologies that incorporate

‘values, standpoints, the situatedness and reflexivity of the knower’ (ibid:vii–viii). More recently, feminists use concepts of affect, emotion, new materialisms and embodied research. They engage with the range of ways in which to integrate non-dualist thought in their philosophical and empirical practices within gender studies (ibid.:vii). Hughes and Lury (2013) identify this as a ‘re-turn’ of the significance of situated knowledge, which challenges essentialism of identity and recognizes the ‘intensity of multi-dimensional trajectories, as concepts are de- and re-contextualised’ (ibid.:787). Rather than setting different perspectives in opposition a ‘diffracted reading’ (Barad, 2007) of identities and situations allows for connection between different theories, to unpack how certain feminist concerns can be approached from different angles in different historical and intellectual contexts.

Women’s voices are central to this research. But I recognize that women’s identities are not rigid or fixed and cannot be categorized readily into predetermined sociological categories. Thus in this research I enable participants’ subjectivity and personality to serve the research process, to give recognition to those whose experiences may have been under researched,¹³ particularly in the context of gender research in Bangladesh. My research design enables women to construct their own identities informed by their gender and class positions, reflecting on the categories of new womanhood I presented to them derived from the existing literature on South Asian new women. My use of visual materials to aid participants’ construction of their identities simultaneously reflects on the media construction of new womanhood and women’s responses to such constructions – accepting and rejecting certain categories.

¹³ I have argued in the introductory chapter and chapter three that gender research in Bangladesh is predominantly focused on poor women.

This research is further guided by feminist theories, of doing gender and difference (West and Zimmerman, 1991, 2009; West and Fenstermaker, 1995) as well as feminist critiques of mainstream disciplinary theories, such as sociological theories of class (Bourdieu, 1992, 2008). Feminist social research utilizes gender as the variable and power/experience/action as relations under investigation (Reinharz, 1992:249). I place understandings of womanhood generated from different conceptual angles in conversation with one another, selecting methods that engage with ‘aspects of each in dynamic rationality to the other’ (Barad, 2007: 92–93). In each case, there is an attempt to ‘read across’ approaches and trajectories, to ‘come back to persistent troublings’ (Hughes and Lury, 2013:787). In this research, the relations between respectability and new womanhood can be understood as the troubling, which the concept of doing/redoing gender and class and boundary work seek to address.

My research also fulfils my political and feminist agenda of building awareness about how understanding middle-class womanhood in Bangladesh helps investigate the inevitable complexity of women’s classed position in the country. This is a shift from the wide range of research available on poor women’s negotiations with gender norms in the country. As noted in the introduction of the thesis, middle-class womanhood is an under-researched area in Bangladesh, and the majority of the studies on gender relations in the country serve the mutually inclusive purpose of women’s empowerment and poverty reduction, an approach to gender research that resonates with Mohanty et al’s (1991) critique of ‘third world women’ as a singular monolithic subject, in need of rescuing. Feminist research has indicated that denying the subjectivity and positionality of certain groups undermines that group’s experiences. Historically such denial led to the production of knowledge that has neglected them, while other group’s experiences are privileged. Whilst commonly understood as a

privileged class, I argue that through studying middle-class women's experiences, practices and 'doings' of the classed gender identity of respectable femininity, there is an opportunity to better understand social change in relation to the construction of new womenhoods as hybrid, fluid and heterogeneous identities in urban Bangladesh. I study these identities both within the home and at workplaces, recognizing the multiple social realities within which such womenhoods are constructed. I use participants' experiences to highlight the formation of hybrid and multiple forms of selfhood in urban Bangladesh, which provide us with a useful counterpoint to constructions of Bangladeshi women as oppressed and discriminated against (as 'third world' women). This project stems from my own reflections on the lived experiences of middle-class Bangladeshi women around me, who rarely appeared in the very substantial literature I studied as part of my degrees in the area of gender in Bangladesh. I reflect further on my personal agenda and my position as a researcher in the ethics and power section of this chapter.

Research Design

In this research I use qualitative methods, advocating 'an integrative...approach to knowledge which grounds theory contextually in the concrete reality of women's everyday lives' (Oakley, 1998:713). In so doing I highlight the value of women's everyday experiences and their everyday ways of being, and doing things (Aptheker, 1989). Feminist research in the US mostly uses quantitative methods but in countries outside the US (including the UK) they mostly use qualitative methods (Hughes and Cohen, 2010:191). Similarly my methodology is informed by context and the disciplinary predominance of qualitative methods. My intention is to explore the meaning and motivations of participants' practices and experiences rather than to

produce statistically generalizable findings, for which qualitative methods are more suitable. However, I will review quantitative data on women's progress in Bangladesh in relation to the Millennium Development Goals in chapter four, establishing that women's progress in education, labour market and governance is broadly inconsistent rather than uniform. The quantitative data helped me frame my smaller scale and in-depth study.

In this qualitative study, I stayed in touch with my participants for a year, between January and December 2012, conducting focus group discussions and multiple in-depth interviews. Four of my participants participated in the focus group and two interviews and the other 17 participants participated in two interviews each. I used the focus group to identify the new women of Bangladesh and why they are the new women; I used the interviews for the same purpose as well as to explore participants' sense of self, values, experiences and practices of womanhood in the changing society of Bangladesh, in relation to the idea of the new woman. Yearlong research activities were designed to help me cut through the initially more simplified and essentialized stories about participants' identities of new womanhood. They provided me with extensive data which helped me develop a rich and comparative basis for understanding change and continuity in formulating identities (McLeod, 2003:202) of new womanness. I focused on wider social structures and institutional contexts as well as the everyday interactions of women within these structures as they changed jobs, household patterns etc.

The initial aim of this research was to develop an understanding of who the new women of Bangladesh are, focusing particularly on women's negotiations with patriarchy and religious and cultural constraints. Post-field work, this objective was

amended to include the rich data on women's experiences and practices which illuminated the intersection of class and gender in constructing new womanhood. My strategy was to focus on women's explanation for their explanations (Kabeer, 2000:405), the underlying factors which women themselves considered important. I aligned participants' responses with social science theories which help understand their experiences and practices further. To respond to participants' accounts I substituted my initial conceptual framework around patriarchy, religious (Islamic) and cultural dimensions of gender relations in Bangladesh, for one framed around theories and concepts of gender, class, respectability and boundary work.

Preliminary Stage: Field Visit, Access, Sampling of Participants and Audio-Visual Prompts and Focus Group Discussion

Field Visit and Access

I went to Dhaka in December 2011 for the first phase of my field work. My sampling frame was selected from the available literature on South Asian new women, which identified the following characteristics: urban, middle-class, university educated and mid-level professional women. I used snowball sampling as a means of finding suitable respondents. In snowball sampling the researcher initially samples a small group of people 'relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have the experience and characteristics relevant for the research' (Bryman, 2012:424). I started sampling by approaching women who self-identified as middle class, living in Dhaka, with tertiary education, and in mid to upper-level positions in their careers.¹⁴ Participants' accounts of their own

¹⁴ As I targeted women in mid to upper level positions the sample only constituted women above 30 years of age.

understanding of new womanhood in Bangladesh helped solve the tension of me imposing pre-existing categories; the first query in my focus group and interviews was to ask the respondents who they identified as the new women of Bangladesh and what characteristics the new women possess. Further mechanisms to reduce the tension of pre-existing categories of the participants are discussed throughout this chapter.

To avoid any inherent bias in the snowball sampling method, I initiated multiple snowballs electronically through emails from the UK,¹⁵ before going to Dhaka. I sent all possible participants a document explaining the purpose of the focus group and interviews and a brief description of the research. Although a number of them agreed to participate, upon my arrival in Dhaka accessing them became extremely difficult. I realized that my selection of mid to upper-level professionals meant that I was targeting 'powerful and busy people' with complex work (such as after hour dinners, field work etc.) and family commitments both in terms of domestic responsibility and social events, which made access to them difficult (Easterby-Smith et al, 1993). Due to such access issues I had to improvise my plan.

I draw on Perriton's (2000) concept of the 'incestuous field' to explain my improvised plan to access participants. In an 'incestuous field' researchers start their research with peers, employees, managers, friends, lovers, family members and team members, and then expand it to distant informants. Perriton argues that friendship and research are 'a potent mix', and something researchers need to stop being surprised about and turn into a 'normal' feature of research, a place of insight and not a subject of cover-up. Drawing an initial sample from such an 'incestuous field' reduces the 'anxiety' and difficulty involved in initiating research relationships or rapport with strangers and

¹⁵ I targeted women I knew and who met the criteria for sampling in this research.

negotiating access. The shared ‘cultural patterns’ and life experiences of the researcher and the researched can also facilitate greater openness to questions (ibid.). So I developed a new plan, contacting some friends who were suitable candidates for the research and started expanding my snowballs to approach more women to participate in the focus group. Finally, I managed to find four participants for the focus group; two were my friends, the third was a friend of my cousin (whom I had only met a couple of times before) and the fourth my sister’s university lecturer (whom I had met just once before). All of them met my criteria for participants and also became interview participants afterwards.

Selecting Audio-Visual Prompts

It was difficult for me to explain the concept of the new woman to participants drawing from available literature¹⁶ without closing down discussion through my definitions. Moreover, I was interested in how they defined her and what they saw as her central characteristics. So I decided to use audio-visual materials as stimuli to initiate discussion about the new women of Bangladesh and chose to use four mobile phone advertisements made for television. Following Hall (1997), I was interested in how participants read and made sense of these cultural products:

‘Culture, it is argued is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes or comics – as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – the “giving and taking of meaning” – between members of a society or group...Thus culture

¹⁶ In terms of beyond the economic/cultural designations such as middle class, highly educated and professional.

depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and “making sense” of the world, in broadly similar ways.’ (Hall, 1997:2)

Building on Hall (1997), Rose (2012:2) argues that cultural materials such as art, TV shows, movies etc. are key sites where meaning about the world are produced. These meanings may be ‘explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious, felt as truth or fantasy, science or common sense’ (ibid.:2). Representations structure the way people think about the world and how they behave in relation to their meaning making of the world. Visual culture can visualize or render invisible social differences, whereby a depiction is a site of construction (ibid.:7). Thus images of social difference are important to study because of what they show (or do not show), and the ‘ways of seeing them’ (Berger, 1972). ‘We never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves’ (ibid.:9). Hence, seeing and understanding a particular representation of femininity means developing an understanding of other kinds of femininities and masculinities as well. Building on this meaning making aspect of visual media that connects the image and the spectator, I used television advertisements as a research tool, to explore both how advertisements represented Bangladeshi women as well as how viewing of the advertisements influenced the position of the viewers in relation to it (Rose, 2012:13). Through the advertisements participants constructed their own definitions of new women, rather than just responding to the categories I presented to them from the literature.

The advertisements depicted several different women in various spaces, professions and clothing who were doing different things, both within the home and in the public sphere. I asked the focus group participants and the interviewees to discuss their responses to the advertisements in relation to who the new women were and were not,

and to consider how the characteristics of the new women related to them and their lives. In this way, I was able to use the advertisements as an anchor to address perceptions of new womanhood and the participants' new woman identities. Using visual media helped the research in three ways. First, it grounded my interview questions, providing participants with a meaningful context for discussion which would otherwise be difficult to explain in words. Second, it provided participants with a stimuli to engage visually with familiar (or unfamiliar) settings and practices, and to think about practices and experiences that they take for granted as mundane aspects of their lives. Finally, it helped participants think of people, events or situations that may not directly resemble them, but may be useful to explain constructions of new womanhood, either through similarity or difference (Bryman, 2012:480).

I used purposive sampling to select the mobile phone advertisements. My strategy was to compile a collection of female ideal types (though it was certainly not exhaustive) including an urban homemaker, a rural woman working in Dhaka, and urban women working in various professions, including a very high achiever (woman of the year). Women have been a target market for mobile phone advertisements in Bangladesh. As part of a microfinance initiative, the Village Phone Program (VPP) provides poor rural women with a mobile phone under a lease-financing program, and provides mobile phone services in the adjoining area, covering both outgoing and incoming calls (Hossain and Beresford, 2012). Due to this initiative, mobile phone advertisements in Bangladesh target women as one of their primary customers and it was easy for me to find a range of female characters in mobile phone advertisements. The advertisements were broadcast between 2007 and 2010. The following table presents description of the female characters in the advertisements: their professions, the spaces they occupy

(home, work) and their clothing practices. These characteristics inform data analysis in chapters' five to eight.

No.	Product	Year	Role of Woman	Space and Activities	Clothing Practice
A1	BBC Janala (BBC Window) A cell phone service for learning English	2010	Homemaker	Home Cooking	Sari with short sleeved blouse, jewellery, stylized hair cut
A2	Grameen Phone A cell phone set and package offer by the Grameen Phone provider	2008	A rural young woman working in the city	Home and Outdoors Travelling	Cotton sari, with long sleeved blouse, hair tied in a bun
A3	Anik Telecom Cell phone set and accessories	2009	Architect who wins women achiever award	Home, Work and Outdoors Driving, Working and Shopping	Western style suit, trousers and shirt and a gorgette sari, stylized hair cut
A4	AKTEL Cell phone service provider	2007	A doctor & a Teacher	Work and Outdoors Travelling, Working	Doctor: Fatua and Denim trousers Teacher: stylized salwar kameez

Table 4.1: List of advertisements and characteristics of female characters

A translated transcription of the advertisements is provided in Appendix 1; here I provide a brief summary.

A1 presents a wife cooking breakfast in the kitchen when a mobile phone rings. When she answers the phone she realizes the call is for her husband from a Westerner speaking in English. Although she stumbles at the beginning to speak in a foreign language she eventually gains confidence and asks the caller to call back later. Her husband is surprised at her fluency in English and at this point she informs him that she learnt English through a mobile phone service offering tutorials over the phone.

A2 presents a rural woman living in a women's hostel in the city, returning to her hostel from work very late at night. Upon her return the caretaker informs her that her father had called several times. When she calls back using the hostel's phone the shopkeeper whose phone the father used to call her informs her that her father went home. Later she returns home very excited as she has brought the best gift for her father on Eid, a mobile phone through which they can stay in touch with each other. She then finds out that her father also bought the same mobile phone for her.

A3 starts with fast-paced Western music and presents a young unmarried girl from morning till night extremely busy with her work. She goes to work, where she is informed that she won the Woman of the Year Award, she goes shopping, in the evening she goes to the award show and finally she meets her boyfriend after the show. However, throughout the day her boyfriend keeps calling her but due to his bad phone service he can never reach her. Finally in the evening after her award show the woman buys her boyfriend the same mobile as hers so they can keep in touch with each other without any interruption.

Finally A4 presents a group of young men and women on their way to a holiday outside the city. On their way they come across a rural old couple by the road; the wife is trying to stop cars to help her get her sick husband to a hospital. One of the women who is a doctor asks the man driving the car to stop and they take the couple in. She immediately starts treating the old man, consulting her superior doctor over the phone, while the other woman character takes care of the old man by fanning him and wiping his brow. In the meantime, others (men) also communicate on their phones to arrange for a bed in a nearby hospital and cash. Finally the old man is taken to the hospital and recovers.

Focus Group

After sampling four participants for the focus group and selecting the audio-visual materials I conducted the focus group discussion at my house in the evening, after all participants' office hours. The focus group is a popular method for researchers examining the 'ways in which people in conjunction with one another construe the general topics in which the researcher is interested' (Bryman, 2012:503). They are also considered to have significant potential for feminist research in terms of minimizing the researcher's control of or 'power over' the data generation; the role of the researcher is only to raise topics of discussion and facilitate conversation as necessary. I used the focus group to explore whether participants felt that there was a community of new women in Bangladesh; if so who they were, and why they were considered new women. This allowed me to progress my research in three ways: first, to check the saliency of my research topic, the existence of new women in Bangladeshi society; second, to validate the criteria for selection of research participants and expand the snowballs; third, to identify the issues and practices related to the identity of new women deemed to be important by the focus group participants. The focus group discussion ran for three hours. The guidelines used for the focus group are available in Appendix 2. I also asked all participants to fill out some basic demographic information on a form which is available in Appendix 3.

The participants were in no doubt that there existed a group of new women in urban Bangladesh and were clear about their characteristics. There was a brief discussion about whether there was also a group of 'new men' who were supportive of new women, but due to strong disagreements from most participants the discussion on the topic discontinued. All participants identified themselves as new women and

explained urban lifestyle, tertiary education, career, work-home life balance and hybrid aesthetic practice as important characteristics of new womanhood. As previously described, focus group participants also led me to interview participants for the rest of the research through snowballing. The four advertisements that I had chosen worked well to situate the discussion, and the women clearly pursued a ‘double analysis’, reading the women presented through a commentary on their own lives, as hoped.

Sampling

After the focus group, the snowball method worked unexpectedly well and I started getting recommendations for possible participants for the main interviews very quickly. Some of these came from the focus group participants, and three participants came from the original snowballs I started from the UK (although they could not participate in the focus group, they participated in the interviews), and they also referred me to other participants. Overall this generated 21 research participants. Sample size in qualitative research should not be too small but sufficient to achieve data saturation; at the same time, the sample should also not be so large that a deep, case-oriented analysis is difficult (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). I found 21 participants, a manageable sample size enabling me to reach a diverse group of women, and collect enough data to achieve theoretical saturation. My sample was generated by utilizing the ‘dynamics of natural and organic social networks’, which is distinctive to chain methods of snowball sampling and has implications in terms of social capital (Bourdieu, 2008) and the reproduction of social systems (Noy, 2008:335). The questions ‘who is and who is not referring others’, as well as ‘who is and who is not being referred by others’, assume a significant social consequence

(ibid.:335). In this research, participants who identified themselves as new women further selected others who they thought were new women. Thus the sample represents the participants' social network, an integral part of their class privilege and identity of new womanhood. Figure 3.1 illustrates the sampling tree for this research.¹⁷

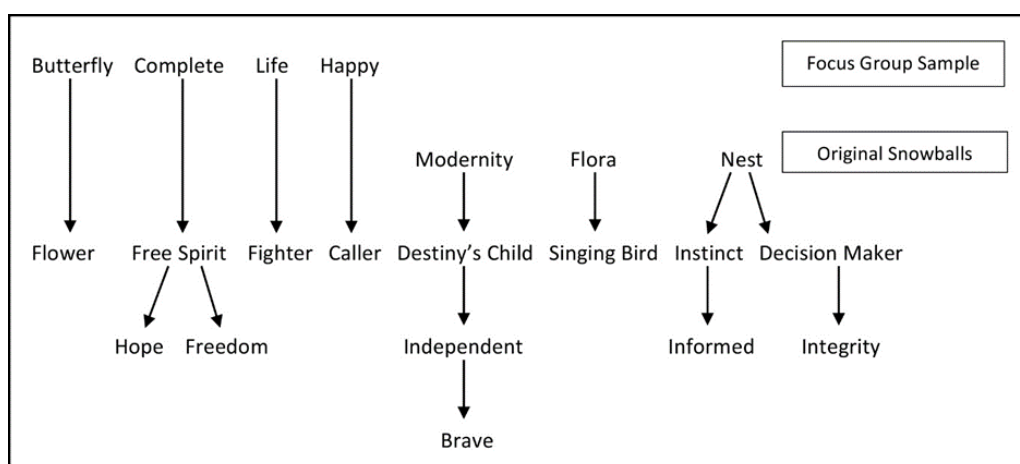


Figure 4.1: Sampling tree of participants

While the social network of participants facilitated the process of generating a sample it also posed some challenges. Some potential participants seemed to volunteer out of courtesy, due to the social networks through which I approached them, but were not necessarily interested in participating. There was an occasion when I was due to interview a potential participant; I confirmed the appointment that morning through text message but did not receive any response. I then called her just before the meeting and again did not receive any response; I suspected this may be a 'no show', but decided to go for the meeting, as the potential participant could be too busy to respond to text messages or take calls. After waiting for almost an hour and making continuous calls to her mobile with no response, I received a call from another member of staff

¹⁷ For details on how participants were named for the research see the discussion following on page 79.

from her office who said he noticed I was calling the Manager and wanted to know if he could help. He informed me that the potential participant had gone to a press conference an hour before our scheduled meeting and was not expected back that day. I returned home frustrated, and did not receive any subsequent apology or explanation from her.

The 21 participants were varied in terms of age, educational, professional, marital and motherhood status; as shown in following table. The table also divides the sample, between three categories of organizations they work for: Corporate Businesses, Public & Educational Institutes and NGOs and Development Organizations; and three household settings: extended, semi-extended and nuclear (at point of first interview). In addition, I have added a column detailing the time (in years) some participants have lived in Western countries. I used these categories to guide my thematic analysis in later chapters of this research.

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Marital status	Children	Type of Organization and Designation	Education	Years lived in a Western Country	Household setting
1.	Life	40	Married	3	Corporate Business, Senior Executive	Post-graduate	0	Nuclear
2.	Flora	33	Married	0	NGO & Development Manager	Post-graduate	0	Extended
3.	Independent	38	Married	2	Corporate Business, Deputy General Manager	Graduate	5	Semi-extended
4.	Modernity	35	Single	0	NGO & Development Org, Senior Research Officer	Graduate	0	Extended
5.	Free Spirit	34	Married	2	Corporate Business Manager	Graduate	1	Semi-extended
6.	Destiny's Child	35	Married	2	Corporate Business, Director	Post-graduate	0	Extended
7.	Hope	34	Married	1	Corporate Business, Country Manager	Post-graduate	5	Semi-extended
8.	Decision Maker	35	Married	1	Public & Educational Institutes, Senior Research Associate	Post-graduate	2	Semi-extended
9.	Freedom	35	Married	0	NGO & Development Org, Governance Advisor	Post-graduate	2	Nuclear
10.	Fighter	40	Married	2	Corporate Business, Manager	Post-graduate	0	Nuclear
11.	Flower	39	Married	1	NGO & Development Org, Director	Post-graduate	38 American Bangladeshi	Nuclear

12.	Brave	35	Married	0	Corporate Business, Deputy General Manager	Graduate	0	Semi-extended
13.	Integrity	38	Married	0	Public & Educational Institutes, Associate Professor	Post-graduate	10	Semi-extended
14.	Happy	38	Married	0	Public & Educational Institutes, Senior Lecturer	Post-graduate	10	Nuclear
15.	Informed	35	Married	0	Public & Educational Institutes, Assistant Professor	Post-graduate	5	Nuclear
16.	Caller	45	Married	4	Corporate Business, Managing Director	Post-graduate	2	Nuclear
17.	Singing Bird	38	Married	2	NGO & Development Org, Senior Manager	Post-graduate	10	Semi-extended
18.	Butterfly	32	Married	1	NGO & Development Org, Manager	Post-graduate	1	Semi-extended
19.	Complete	32	Single	0	NGO & Development Org, Senior Researcher	Post-graduate	2	Extended
20.	Nest	34	Single (Divorced)	0	NGO & Development Org, Senior Researcher	Post-graduate	2	Extended
21.	Instinct	35	Single	0	Public & Educational Institutes, Assistant Professor	Post-graduate	5	Extended

Table 4.2: Sample participants' details

To protect the identities of my participants I decided to use pseudonyms. In Bangladeshi culture (as in other South Asian countries like India and Pakistan), it is believed that the meaning of a child's name has an *Aser* or effect on their character. For example, my name Nazia means 'freedom' and according to the naming culture of Bangladesh, it is believed that due to my name, I will live a 'free' life, where the meaning of 'free' is open to individual interpretation. As this research is concerned with how new woman identities are developed, practised and experienced, following the Bengali naming culture, I asked my participants to choose a pseudonym themselves that reflects their self-identity as a new woman. Some chose English words and others chose Bengali words, which I translated. All participants were asked to explain in a few words why they chose the pseudonym and how it reflected their lives and identities today. A list of all participants' pseudonyms and their reasoning behind them is available in Appendix 1. I will discuss one example by way of further illustration to readers who are unfamiliar with such naming cultures.

My oldest participant is 45 years old and the managing director of her own research company. She chose the Bengali word *ahobankari* as her pseudonym. The literal translation of *ahobankari* in English is Caller. This is how she explained her choice:

'You know like the Prophet. I have been constantly tested and challenged in my life. Whether in the family or at work. I had good education and a comfortable life in my mother's house, but because of all that I was considered arrogant and proud in my in-law's house. Then I came up with the idea of a business and social research firm which was appropriate and much needed in the Bangladeshi market at that time, but I had to struggle to start my own business as women in those days rarely went into consultancy businesses.'

These are the big things, but in everyday life my ideas, wishes and conduct were constantly challenged and criticized. But I was strong in my belief in myself! I knew if I set a goal and work hard then I will achieve it, despite challenges and criticisms. And now I have created an example for my daughters and the new generation of young women, sending the message that believe in yourself and confront the opposition rather than giving up. One must create her own destiny, do not wait for others' support, if you do you will never achieve your dreams. Today I call on young girls, especially my daughters, to follow my path.'

I struggled to translate names like Caller. Due to the participant's comparison of her life with that of the (Islamic) Prophet Muhammad, I thought of terms such as 'leader' and 'summoner'; I soon realized that people may misinterpret the word 'summoner' as it commonly means a call to be present at court. A 'leader', on the other hand, leads or commands a group; but my participant portrays herself as one who *appeals* to others to follow her path, rather than commanding them. Thus I settled on the pseudonym Caller, but ask readers not to misread it as a person who calls on the phone or makes a brief visit, rather the one who advocates a certain way of life and calls on others to follow that way of life. Not all names were this hard to translate, 17 of the participants actually chose English words as their pseudonyms, such as Life, Integrity, Free Spirit etc. Only four chose Bengali words which I translated: Modernity (*adhunika*), Informed (*shocheton*), Caller (*ahobankari*), Complete (*shompon*).

Stage One: Face to Face Interviews and Transcription and Translation

Face to Face Interviews

Stage one of my field work ran from January to September 2012, in Dhaka. According to Graham: ‘The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principle means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives’ (1984 cited in Reinharz, 1992:18), which is applicable in this research. Systematic analysis of unstructured (or semi-structured) interviews is a suitable method for the study of doing gender (and class), that is exploration of accountability to gender and class categories (West and Zimmerman, 2009). I used semi-structured interviews with 21 participants to generate data and I interviewed each participant at least twice. The first phase of interviews was conducted face to face and lasted for at least two hours, sometimes more.

The interviews resembled qualities of both a life history approach and experience-centred narrative interviews (Squire, 2008). While extensive life histories or stories, characterized by minimal interruption by the interviewer, are a common unit of analysis, derived of interest in the role and significance of agency in social life (Bryman, 2012), a narrative inquiry covers a relatively select area of a participant’s life (Chase, 2005). Although my interviews resembled a life history approach, I locate my approach in *post hoc* manner fitting well the experience-centred narrative approach (Squire, 2008). Such an approach helped me consider participants’ narratives as representative of complex experiences, explaining how they come to identify as new woman, referring to transformation or change in their lives, all through telling me the story of their lives (Bryman, 2012).

I began the interviews with a discussion of findings from the focus group, about who the new women are and what characteristics they may have. All my interview respondents agreed with the characteristics of educational, professional and urban lifestyle; while for work-home life balance and aesthetic practices they added various other points to how to actually achieve ‘balance’ in both these practices. Then I showed the selected mobile phone advertisements to the interview participants and asked them to discuss the advertisements, both to define new women and in terms of whether they considered themselves new women. All of them did identify themselves as new women, and when asked why, they discussed a great range of factors, starting from their childhood, how they were raised, the gendered relations they saw around them, moving on to their places of education and educational achievements, and covering their travels, profession, embodiment practices, religion, marriage, household relations, future plans and so on. These became the primary themes of the interviews although I also had a checklist of pre identified themes such as influence of gender, class, religion and culture in forming participants’ identities as new women and the liberties and constraints they face in contemporary Bangladeshi society as women (see Appendix 5). I interviewed participants twice over the course of a year; this also helped me to address participants’ understanding of continuity and change in their lives. I used a free conversational format but tried to make sure that a previously identified checklist of key issues was covered in the course of the conversation, for example: what is the difference between new women and other women of Bangladesh; what are the advantages and constraints of new women within the home and workplaces. The checklist for the first phase of face to face interviews is available in Appendix 5.

The open discussion of participants' life experiences helped me identify the inner experiences of women, how they interpret, understand and define their womanhood situated within the wider social structures of home, work, class, social change etc. The interviews were marked by laughter, tears, self-disclosure, and self-realizations. Twelve out of the twenty one women at some point of the interviews affirmed that the issues under discussion were experiences, feelings or thoughts that they had never shared with anyone before. Some, like Life, Independent and Brave, came to realize (to their surprise) their own understanding of certain experiences for the first time, as they had never thought about their everyday practices in such detail before. Two participants, Brave and Nest, broke down in tears during the interviews, which also upset me, invoking concern. One such incident was when Brave explained how the role of breadwinner in her natal family is now reversed, whereby she brings festival gifts home for Eid (religious festival) as opposed to her father. Although this role reversal to some extent makes her father proud of her achievements, there also exists a deep sense of sorrow, as Brave's father expected his son to take this role, not his daughter. The devaluation of a daughter's breadwinner role is a source of discontent for Brave, which continually upset her and made her feel unappreciated for her achievements.

Such detailed and affective responses of women to the interviews made me confident that the interviews emphasized interviewee frames and understanding of issues, practices, relations and events. Here I would like to acknowledge that the participants did not discuss their dependences on working-class women such as their domestic labour or women working in the garment industry to as much detail as they did for other women in their families like mothers-in-law. Such ambivalence towards their dependencies on working class women are an example of the differential negotiation

of privileged (affluent middle-class participants) and under privileged (working-class) women with modernity and thus each group investing differently in the formation of multiple forms of modernities.

The interviews were highly flexible, and I allowed the participants to pursue topics of particular interest to them, which resulted in discussions of respectability, clothing practices and in-law relationships, none of which were identified as a focus of the interviews by me. Of particular interest was participants' assessment of their own lives in relation to wider social structures, social change and other women around them, which helped me unpack mechanisms of classed gender practices among new women.

Recording, Translation and Transcription

The focus group and all interviews (including the second phase of phone and skype interviews discussed later) were recorded with participants' consent. Soon after the focus group I was faced with the challenge of transcription and translation of the discussions. Although most participants spoke in a mixture of English and Bengali (a common form of speech among urban educated Bangladeshis), the process of translating from Bengali to English was quite complex for a non-native English speaker like me. Following advice from my supervisors I started translating and transcribing discussions while in the field. Transcribing is very time consuming and translating and transcribing take even longer. In addition, detailed transcription yields vast data, all of which may not be entirely useful for analysis. Thus I started my translation and transcription by selecting experiences and practices that appeared most relevant for the research and were commonly discussed by all participants. Drawing on Bryman (2012) I also started preliminary analysis of generated data while in the field, to make myself aware of the emerging themes that I may want to emphasize in

future interviews. The whole process of translation, transcription and ongoing analysis was demanding and time consuming. But it offered great benefits in terms of bringing me closer to the data, and enabling me to start to identify key themes and become aware of similarities and differences between participants' accounts.

Following Foucault (1980), Palmary (2011) argues that translation is a political process, particularly when translation takes place across cultures (ibid.:101); indeed 'transparent translation is neither possible nor desirable if we take seriously the ways that language produces meaning in research' (ibid.:99). In apparently 'transparent' translation (particularly from non-English to English), the translator's labour is concealed, and the data are represented as original, while this process actually flattens local contexts, to make anything not English sound much the same to an English reader (ibid.:102). The translator seeks to re-tell something to a different culture, coding with the values, beliefs and social representations of the target culture (Venuti, 2002). Particularly when translation is into English, apparently 'transparent' translation maintains unequal power relations, and can produce a listener or reader that is culturally insular (Spivak, 2000), legitimating a neocolonial construction of non-western society.

For this research, although in some cases I found accurate translation next to impossible (see discussion on participants' chosen names), two factors helped my translation process. Firstly, it is common practice among the target participants of this research to speak in a combination of English and Bengali. Thus all of them continuously used English words to explain experiences, feelings and practices. For example, Flora used the word 'hanky-panky' to describe an inappropriate, and rather sexually devious, style of dressing. The slang travels well across cultures, especially

to English, without creating problems in relation to translation. Secondly, when I was unsure of a Bengali word's English translation I often asked for friends and family members' suggestions as to an appropriate translation. For example, participants constantly used the Bengali term *man shonman*, which literally translates into 'measure of reputation'. Following much discussion with several friends and family, I decided to translate it into 'respectability', which later became a key conceptual framework for my data analysis.

Despite my common cultural and linguistic background with the participants, I found the translation process extremely difficult, probably the most difficult part of my research methodology. I would thus like to recognize that authentic meaning is lost in a translated text, whereby certain sections of my data may be one step removed from the intention of my research participants. Thus between me and my participants, the concept of new womanhood is a contested site of meaning making, open to negotiation (Palmary, 2011: 110).

Stage Two: Long Distance Interviews and Data Analysis

Long Distance Interviews

The second phase of interviews were conducted through telephone or skype from the UK, between October and December, 2012. These were the only feasible options for interviewing since it was impossible for me to go back to Bangladesh within a year, due to work and family commitments in the UK. For this phase I sent the participants a list of topics derived from the first phase of interviews, such as clothing practices (with a focus on workplaces) and household relations (particularly with mothers-in-law), that I would like to discuss during the interviews, so they knew what kind of

questions to expect. These were topics and themes which emerged repetitively in the previous phase of interviews but were not fully explored during the first phase. The topics also varied slightly from participant to participant, depending on their marital status, household setting, the organizations they worked for etc. A sample of one of the topics of discussion during the second phase of interviews is provided in appendix 6. This preparation also saved time and money on overseas phone calls. As the second set of interviews were designed to probe more deeply into issues that were raised by the interviewees in the first interviews, I found that telephone and skype interviews were equally detailed as face to face interviews; participants were quite expansive in their replies, and there were no significant technological problems.

In addition, during the interviews I asked participants some clarification questions, to resolve any ambiguities in their narratives from the first phase of interviews. This provided an opportunity to the participants to reflect on their previous interview, sometimes providing their own analysis or explanation of experiences and practices. It also helped me refine and redefine some of my analytical codes, which enriched my analytical process and actively contributed to the emergence of key themes. As I interviewed the same 21 participants, access was much more straightforward than before. However, for one of my participants, Modernity, I could not find a suitable time to conduct a live interview, thus she responded to the identified topics and clarification questions in writing, through emails. All telephone interviews were conducted on my iPhone and using two applications, TapeACall and CallRecorder, I recorded the entire calls for transcription afterwards. I used the computer program skype to interview three of my participants, and these calls were also recorded on my iPhone recorder.

Data Analysis

I was originally interested to find out more about the new woman identity among urban middle-class female Bangladeshis, and how such an identity affected their work and home life. As I started analysing the data collected through the first phase of my field work (focus group and interviews), my view of the theories or literature identified as relevant for the study at the beginning of the researched changed. This is something Bryman identifies as a common instance in research (ibid.:25). After conducting an initial thematic analysis of the data, I realized that the concepts of respectability, boundary work and aesthetic labour were relevant to analyse the data. In addition, I also came across new theoretical ideas and literature which I had not read before, particularly on respectable femininity. Thus my analytical approach took an *inductive* turn, whereby some of my theoretical and conceptual ideas are derived from my data. This inductive stance explains how the theories used in this research are an outcome of findings (ibid.:26).

Consequently, for the second phase of my data collection, I took an *iterative* approach, and focused on the newly identified theoretical and conceptual frameworks (though new womenness still remained the major domain of query) in order to explore if class, respectability, boundary work and aesthetic labour can facilitate data analysis. An iterative approach involves weaving back and forth between data and theory, and has particular similarities with grounded theory (ibid.:26). The combination of an inductive and iterative approach appears as an alternative strategy for linking theory and research to a *deductive* approach, but it invariably contains deductive elements too. In a deductive approach, the researcher comes up with a hypothesis (or an area of empirical scrutiny) based on what is known about a particular domain and of

theoretical considerations in relation to that domain (Bryman, 2012:24). For my research my primary research domain, new womenhood, remained the same, while the conceptual frameworks to analyse varied aspects of new womanhood changed due to the iterative nature of analysis. Thus my strategy of data analysis through various concepts and theories can be identified as both deductive and inductive.

These processes of data analysis resulted in some changes to my research questions. My old research questions were: 1) to what extent do the urban, educated, earning women of Bangladesh think of themselves as the ‘new women’ of Bangladesh, and what does this mean to them? 2) How free are they from patriarchal, religious and cultural obligations? 3) How does the intersection of gender, religion, culture and class in Bangladeshi society influence the position of the ‘new woman’? 4) What can the analysis of the ‘new woman’ in Bangladesh contribute to our conceptual understanding of gendered power structures? As discussed in chapter two, the first research question mostly remained the same, while the rest of the questions became more specific in relation to exploring how class, cultural and some religious obligations affected new women’s construction of respectability in relation to aesthetic practices, work-home life balance etc. The experiences and practices of respectability was a key theme identified from the data, and was not part of my original line of inquiry.

Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012:578). I constructed an index of central themes and subthemes and organized the data accordingly. When searching for themes I looked for repetitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, theory related materials, metaphors etc. (ibid.:580). My central themes resulted in the overall themes of the data analysis

chapters of this thesis, thus the boundaries of distinctions: cultural capitals of space, education, profession and aesthetics (chapter five), negotiation of the practice of respectable femininity through aesthetic practices (chapter six) and 50-50 work-home (chapter seven) and female individualization (chapter eight). I then further divided the central themes into three subthemes for each chapter. For example, in chapter six where I discuss aesthetic practices of participants I used three different types of participants' work organizations as subthemes to evaluate the similarities and differences in their strategic conformation, negotiation and transgression of aesthetic labour and respectability norms in these organizations. I tried to keep the language of the research participants as far as possible, which turned the analysis process into an iterative one, with implications for my conceptual framework. Due to the small number of interview participants and the complex translation and transcription process in this research, I decided to avoid computer-assisted data analysis through programs like NVivo. Although I took a workshop on NVivo, to keep up with the iterative nature of analysis I found use of pencil and paper more productive for the thematic analysis. However, I did construct several tables and charts as word and excel documents for convenience and presentation in this thesis.

Ethics and Power

In this section I explain the issues of ethics and power in the research process and how I addressed them. My research process was guided by the British Sociological Association's (BSA, 2004) guidelines, particularly in the areas of consent, anonymity, confidentiality and privacy. I provided written consent forms to all participants (see Appendix 7) which explained aspects of anonymity, confidentiality, recording the interviews, option of discontinuing the interview and of opportunities to access

research findings at a later date. Questions of power relations between researcher and researched were also important considerations, discussed below.

I am a middle-class Bangladeshi woman, who grew up in the capital city Dhaka and I share many other commonalities with the target participants of the research. The congruency of my gender, class and ethnic identity with the participants enabled me to gain access to the community I studied. I see myself as an ‘insider’ sharing language, social networks, class and educational background *inter alia* with my participants; Mies (1983) has called such insider status of the researcher a ‘conscious partiality’, preventing the researcher from implementing a neutral and indifferent approach to a subject’s responses. However, feminist researchers (Reinharz, 1992) have pointed out that the researcher vs researched position is a ‘false’ dichotomy between subject and object, which hides political domination of women (researched) through their objectification in research. Feminist researchers draw on the ‘epistemology of insiderness’ that sees life and work as interconnected. Thus Reinharz (1992) stated that many feminist researchers argue that studies of women in a particular country should be done by women of that country; ‘an author is an authority insofar as she is also the subject about which she speaks’ (ibid.:261). Thus in this research I see my insider position within the research as an asset rather than a potential source of bias. On the other hand, as a researcher I was intruding into the lives of women who had to find time in their busy schedules to talk to me. Despite my intruder status, I could ‘mingle in’ with the participants only because of my insider status gained through fluency in Bengali language and dressing in Bengali attires (Bhopal, 2001). My physical identity and background immediately created a sense of empathy and belonging with the women I was interviewing, in a way I do not believe someone from a different ethnic, cultural, class and gender background would achieve. In

addition, my participants may have identified me as a new woman as well (though I never asked them specifically), which might have positively influenced their disclosure of identity formation processes in the interviews.

As mentioned before, two of my research participants are my friends and another five are acquaintances through others. There are two possible drawbacks of using an ‘incestuous field’ of friends and acquaintances as one’s sample. First, there may be a problem of ‘overt rapport’ and a tendency of the researcher to elevate known participants’ data, finding them richer than those from participants whom the researcher did not know (Perriton, 2000). However, my research topic was selected on the basis of the experiences and practices of women I had ‘noticed’ around me since my childhood, who I thought represented an alternative type of womanhood than that presented in most academic research on Bangladeshi women. Thus asking people around me about their opinion was as much a relevant starting point to check the saliency of my observations and assumptions as it was a convenience. Second comes the emotional aspect of using friends in one’s research, which may generate awkwardness or discomfort during the research due to the confessional revelation of events which may ‘irrupt’ emotion in both the researched and the researcher (ibid). Or the findings of the research may affect friendships negatively, even ending friendships (ibid). Neither was applicable to my research, as I did not feel any sense of embarrassment or awkwardness, nor did my friends in sharing their stories (some of which I was already aware of). In fact, it was the interviews with participants referred to me by others that were the more overtly emotional ones. Other than Nest, none of my friends and acquaintances got upset during the interviews, and in the case of Nest her emotional response had as much an effect on me as did Brave’s, whom I did not know before. I think my rapport with all my participants and the open-ended, narrative

approach of the interviews made it easier for me and my participants to handle strong emotions during the interviews without feeling awkward or embarrassed. As the two close friends of mine were part of the focus group, where they did not know the other participants, they never assumed my knowledge of certain aspects of their lives, and thoroughly explained their views and opinions. In terms of my friendship with them, far from having any negative effect, our friendship has grown stronger through this research.

The fundamental aspect that helps tackle the tension between subjective and objective reading of data in feminist research is who interprets women's words and how they are interpreted (Bhopal, 2001:282). Semi-structured interviews allow women not only to articulate their own experiences but also to reflect upon the meaning of those experiences (ibid). However, the researcher's ability to listen and to interpret are influenced by her background. Acker et al (1983) argued that a non-hierarchical relationship between researcher and researched results in 'intrinsically more valid data'. I believe I achieved such a non-hierarchical relationship with my participants, which was reflected in my research methods, which emphasized respondents' understanding of experiences rather than just my interpretations. Due to the shared reality of some personal experiences with participants, several participants felt very comfortable discussing various experiences with me, and the majority of the participants at some point in the interviews mentioned how they were discovering the meanings of some of their experiences and practices themselves through their participation.

Rapport between the researcher and the subject is another fundamental aspect of feminist research which helps tackle power imbalances. By establishing rapport, a

feminist researcher reassures herself that she is treating the interviewee in a non-exploitative manner; rapport thus validates the researcher as not just a feminist researcher but also a human being (Reinharz, 1992:265). It symbolizes the researcher's feminist research skills and ethical standing, emphasizing her intent of 'learning from' women and not 'learning about' women (ibid.:264). Rapport establishes a sense of common understanding between the researcher and the researched during field work. It is an 'interactive process and may involve self-disclosure, acts of reciprocity and caring, engaging active listening and showing emotion and empathy or being supportive' (Caroll, 2012:548). It helps reduce some structural barriers, such as 'race', ethnicity and class difference. Several aspects of the research helped me build rapport with the participants. Firstly, the snowball method established that my participants and I were members of the same or similar social networks. In addition I had a couple of friends and acquaintances as my participants, with whom I had a pre-existing rapport (the tension of overt rapport with my friends has been discussed previously). Secondly, my insider status also helped the process of rapport, making it easier for participants to explain experiences and practices in their own language to someone they could identify with. Thirdly, the consent form provided by me detailed my interest in understanding participants' experiences and practices, the use of pseudonyms and the opportunity to access data by the participants. This helped them open up to me, further building rapport and trust. Finally, I continually used self-disclosure, engaged in active listening and showed empathy, support and sensitivity as a strategy (ibid.: 548) during emotionally charged discussion, to further establish a common sense of understanding of the discussed topics.

Conclusion

Conducting this research, which is inspired by feminist frameworks of dialogue, reflexivity, listening to those being researched and developing a vision to build awareness and impact on the world around us, has been both a struggle and a source of self-satisfaction. This chapter has explained my research design, research process, methodology and methods, identifying the problems I faced and how I resolved them. In so doing I have tried to position myself as an active agent in the research process and strived to acknowledge how it may have impacted on the process of knowledge production.

I have explained my adopted research methodology and methods chronologically, clarifying how each phase of the research transpired. I discussed in detail the access and sampling dilemmas I faced in the preliminary phase and in this section my particular focus was on how the use of an incestuous field, such as using close friends as some of my research participants, helped me solve access problems without compromising on the quality of data. This technique helped me acquire a manageable and diverse sample size of 21 participants from multiple snowballs. I also detailed how I tried to emphasize participants' own understanding of their new womanhoods along with their experiences and practices, which informed the rest of the research process. By asking participants to name themselves following the Bangladeshi tradition of naming a child, I generated pseudonyms; gave my participants ownership of them; and learned more about how they constructed their own identities.

In the first stage of my research I conducted face to face interviews, and also dealt with issues of translation and transcription. Using participants own language to

conduct the focus group and interviews helped me build rapport and gain insider status in the research. But I also found the translation process quite difficult and recognize that part of my analysis may in consequence be a simplified way of addressing participants' own understanding of their experiences and practices. Finally I have elaborated on the electronic and telephone interviews and the iterative and inductive/deductive nature of the research. The iterative approach resulted in changing my original research questions to address participants' own understanding of what constituted their identities of new womanhood. Before delving into the analysis of collected data in the next chapter I provide an overview of Bangladeshi context and women's position in the country in which this research took place.

Chapter 5: Reading the New Woman through Mobile Phone Advertisements: Capitals, Distinction and Respectability

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how participants responded to selected mobile phone advertisements in ways that illuminate their reflexive positioning in respect of the new woman. The chapter highlights the role of media in reflecting social change in relation to women's representation in advertisements and the multiple and nuanced reading of media representations by its audience. Participants both identified and sought distinction from certain media representations of women, to generate their own identities around new womanhood and norms of Bengali middle-class respectability. Through participants' responses I demonstrate that, on the one hand, their boundary work from other classes of women reproduces the middle-class's inter-class distinction in relation to the cultural and economic capitals of their urban lifestyle, access to privileged education, having highly-paid and long-term professional roles in reputed organizations, all of which add capital value to their class position and constitute the symbolic capital of middle-class respectability. On the other hand, their nuanced readings of certain boundaries, such as women's public and private roles and aesthetic practices,¹⁸ highlight how they negotiate with boundaries of middle-class respectable practices¹⁹ creating intra-class distinctions. Although this chapter particularly focuses on the construction and performance of middle-class new womanhood, participants' responses also address their perceptions of working-class, upper-class and Western women to construct participants' distinctive classed position.

¹⁸ I use the term aesthetic to mean clothing or dressing practices in this thesis, and use the terms interchangeably.

¹⁹ In relation to class, cultural and religious practices.

This chapter critically analyses participants' responses to selected advertisements to answer my first set of research questions: *Do participants identify as the new women of Bangladesh? How is she configured from their standpoints and to what extent do participants conform to their notion of new women?*

As noted in chapter two, despite the emergence of alternative images of women, particularly since 2000, older stereotyped representation of women still proliferate in Bangladeshi media. The representation of women can still be read in binaries of private vs public, home vs work, virgin vs whore, good vs bad, victim vs saviour, oppressed vs enlightened (Sultana, 2002; Ahmed, 2002; Al Jamil, 2012; Begum, 2008; Chowdhury, 2010) all of which are echoes of the binary representation of respectable vs unrespectable women. The only study that addresses audience response to women's representation in media is conducted by Priyadarshani and Rahim (2010) who claim that young women (mostly students) are critical of such stereotypical representations of women. They demonstrate that the audience want to see professional women, single women, women in non-traditional clothes like Western garb, driving a car or a motorbike, a woman proposing marriage to a man, a woman as the sole breadwinner of a family etc. (ibid.:119). However, none of these studies address how an audiences' classed background influences their reading of the representations of women in Bangladeshi media, particularly in relation to the audience's own identities.

As I analyse participants 'reading' of the advertisements I demonstrate that habitus, capitals and conversion of cultural capitals to other capitals (economic or cultural) are the primary means through which they construct their distinction of affluent middle-class new womanhood. As I have noted, I draw on the theoretical framework of

Bourdieu (2008) to explore how cultural capital has an exchange value, in terms, for example, that higher education certificates usually translate into different positions in the job market (Wetherell, 2012:108). Using participants' accounts I identify four cultural capitals in this chapter: urban location, higher education, fluency in English language, long term careers in reputed organizations, and clothing or aesthetic practices. Whereas participants high income from their jobs are an economic capital. Participants' accounts demonstrate how they convert their cultural capitals into economic capitals such as urban location provides them access to opportunities to higher education which enabled them to get well paid jobs in reputed organizations. On the other hand they are also able to utilize their economic capital of income in attaining further economic and cultural capital for their families through buying material displays of class distinction like cars, sending children to English medium schools etc. Following the analytical framework provided in chapter two this process of transforming certain types of cultural capital into other kinds of capital is an integral part of new women's class distinction. In terms of respectability, as noted also, I follow Skeggs (2004b) who argues that the middle class is marked by a deep-seated commitment to 'self-improvement', 'deferred gratification' and to accruing more and more 'property in the self'. For Skeggs (1997) accrual and legitimization of capitals via improving appearance, knowledge, flats/houses, relationships etc. form the primary outward configuration of the identity of middle-class respectability. In this research participants make comparisons between themselves and other women characters presented in the advertisements and from their own networks, creating distinctions of capitals and tastes, on the basis of the investments they have made in themselves. Following the framework provided in chapter two, I contend that

participants' capital accrual and conversion and investment in the self symbolically authorizes their everyday practices and negotiations²⁰ as respectable.

Additionally, I draw from Fiske (1986) and Press's (1991) use of the concept of polysemy, which recognizes that an audience is composed of a wide variety of groups or subcultures who read media representation differently. In this chapter I demonstrate that participants of in this research are critical of the changing representation of Bangladeshi women in the selected advertisements, and are able to identify the characteristics of new womanhood which are missing in the advertisements. While they agreed with certain class binaries/boundaries, such as differentiating rural and urban women, they were critical of women's representation either at work or home, rather than maintaining an equal balance of both.

I start the chapter by providing an overview of participants' responses to the selected mobile phone advertisements, and how participants did not identify any of the characters represented in the advertisements as a new woman. Then I take on four areas of boundary work illuminated in participants' responses; they are: *spatial boundaries*, *educational boundaries*, *professional boundaries* and *aesthetic boundaries*. I conclude that participants claim distinction through the habitus of urban location, capitals of higher education, English language proficiency, highly paid

²⁰ Feminist scholars like Moi (1991) have claimed that femininity (and masculinity) should be considered a cultural capital. Appropriate performance of femininity is necessary to pursue class interests. Skeggs (1997) has argued that cultural capital of appropriate femininity can only be capitalized upon to create class distinction when it is converted into a symbolic capital. In this research, I contend that respectable femininity is a symbolic capital which combines a progressive global professional image with middle-class respectable femininity and brings power to new women to maintain and reinforce their class distinction.

permanent careers and finally practices of respectability in relation to a 50-50 work-home life balance and what I refer to as ‘smart dressing’.

Overview of Participants’ Responses to the Advertisements

An outline of the four selected mobile phone advertisements was provided in the methodology chapter and detailed transcriptions of the advertisements are available in Appendix 2²¹.

What is noteworthy is when responding to the advertisements how all participants of the research identified with certain aspects of the characters and dis-identified with others and did not view them (the characters in the advertisements) as new women. The characters in A1 and A2 were not identified as new women due to their homemaker and rural status respectively. Participants thought the character in A3 and the two characters in A4 came closest to the identification of new women. This was because they appeared to be accustomed to urban lifestyles, their higher education was reflected in their professional positions of an architect (A3), doctor (A4) and teacher (A4) and the aesthetic appearances of the characters in A4 were also accepted as normative practice of young new women. But the architect character in A3 appeared too ‘Western’ in her appearance and did not seem to have familial responsibilities, as her mother was serving her food in the advertisement and thus she was not considered a new woman. For the characters in A4 they were only presented going on a holiday and at work, and it was unclear if they were married or had any familial

²¹ As noted in chapter three the selected advertisements are named A1, A2, A3 and A4 for discussion in the thesis.

responsibilities, so participants did not have enough information to identify them as new women either.

But all the participants identified themselves as new women. When constructing the identity of new womanhood, participants continuously identified and sought difference from the characters in the advertisements, and used their own attributes to construct Bangladeshi new women's identities. Although the purpose of this research is to highlight the discursive nature of boundaries and binaries, in this chapter following participants own narratives I analyse their account through the binaries they establish in discussing the advertisements. However, through my own analysis I then go on to problematize some of these binaries in chapter six and seven. In the following section I provide detailed discussion of the qualities that participants identified as part of new womanhood.

Spatial Boundaries: Urban, Rural, Public, Private

When discussing the advertisements, participants drew a clear boundary focusing on the distinction between rural and urban spaces and asserted their status as urban women being superior to that of rural women. The identity of urban women was primarily defined in terms of second generation living in the capital city Dhaka.²² Small towns outside the capital city were not considered part of the urban space. In addition, certain housing styles were often referred to as urban, such as contemporary style apartments. However, participants spoke of large independent housing both in

²² Throughout the thesis unless otherwise specified, I use urban women to mean second generation of women living in Dhaka city.

Dhaka and in villages/small towns as part of their heritage from previous generations²³.

The most prominent narrative drew attention to the lack of opportunities to attain cultural (education) and economic (profession) capitals in rural areas and the availability of such opportunities in urban locale. Thirty-four-year-old Free Spirit was a manager in an advertising and PR company during the first phase of interviews and lived in the capital city Dhaka all her life. She responded to the rural woman's character in A2 saying:

‘I only see highly educated professional women around me. There isn't anyone in my office or among my friends who comes from a small town, let alone a village. This may be because I went to good schools and university and now work in the advertising and public relations sector; women of our clan are more modern.’ (Free Spirit, 35)

Awareness of urban women's status as higher than that of rural women was acute in all the participants' responses. The woman's rural origin in A2 puts her outside the boundary of the city – a ‘modern’ space of varied opportunities where new women can maintain and/or acquire various capitals to assert their distinction above rural women. Thus it is not just urban location per se that is enough to distinguish new women from other women, but the availability of various cultural (good schools and universities) and economic capitals (certain types of jobs) that new women can accrue

²³ Dhaka city is one of the most densely populated cities of the world, and due to rapid urbanization many families have rebuilt their independent style houses into contemporary style apartments both for convenience of maintenance and an extra source of income through rent.

and legitimize²⁴ throughout their lives that produces their symbolic distinction from rural women. Modernity is measured through urban location and access to capitals. Free Spirit's social and professional circles are dominated by women who grew up in the city and thus are accustomed to the habitus of urban life. Her clear reference to women of her 'clan' is representative of new women whom she considers 'modern' and thus she reads the character in A2 as rural and traditional. In this research I contend that new women participants add status and respectability²⁵ to their individual self through capital accrual, conversion and legitimization.

Thirty-eight-year-old Independent, who is a deputy general manager at a multinational telecommunication company, said:

'At the end of the day rural women's career progression is limited compared to us. But there are so many opportunities for women like us in Dhaka these days. There are facilities like daycare centres for children, travelling is easy... various work opportunities...all these help us obtain good jobs or continue in our jobs.' (Independent, 38)

Independent's comment highlights the added value of facilities of childcare centres, easy means of travel and 'good' job opportunities, all of which come with her urban location. Such an understanding of the urban space as a distinctive feature which the

²⁴ Bourdieu defines legitimization as 'an institution, action or usage which is dominant, but not recognized as such [me connu comme tel], that is to say, which is tacitly accepted, is legitimate' (Bourdieu in Moi, 1991:1021). Moi claims that legitimization or a position of dominance can only be achieved by amassing 'the maximum amount of specific type of symbolic capital current in the field' (ibid.:1021). To achieve legitimacy agents have to deploy various strategies. In this case the symbolic capital is the middle class's dominance and new women are the agents who legitimize their economic and cultural capitals to represent classed dominance which I argue also constitutes their respectability.

²⁵ As identified in chapter two and the introduction of this chapter, in this research I articulate new women's symbolic capital of respectability in relation to the legitimization process of middle-class privilege.

new women have access to, is derived from their class habitus. As noted in chapter two Bourdieu's (1992) habitus predisposes people to evaluate the world around them consistent with the conditions of their society's class structure, reproducing their own class. People display their social value through their habitus. And one's habitus is constituted by cultural capital and taste which constitute their classed lifestyle. The respondents see their urban location as part of their habitus that provides them with the privilege to develop a taste of certain lifestyle achievable through access to capitals, knowledge, affordability to prospects like daycare centres and transport. Habitus also manifests itself in taste – which is derived from one's knowledge of the relationship between distinctive signs and distribution of properties, which is observable in the next comment. As Governance Advisor Freedom explains:

‘...our parents are more open-minded, and can afford to give us (girls) the same opportunities as boys and encourage us to excel in our education, career etc. With these resources we can acquire the necessary means to continue our pursuits when we are adults. Poor families may not be able to afford to give all their children access to same resources, in such cases they often decide girls should rather stay at home.’ (Freedom, 35)

Taste distinguishes the bourgeois ‘sense of distinction’ from the working-class ‘taste of necessity’ (Bourdieu, 1992; Gilbertson, 2011). The ‘open-mindedness’ of urban parents mentioned by Freedom illustrates the middle-class taste to encourage both boys and girls to pursue education and careers, implying poor families’ ‘backwardness’ of not doing the same. But underlined in Freedom’s assertion is the fact that the middle class can also afford equal educational opportunities for boys and girls, which poorer families may not be able to. Freedom identifies poor families as lacking the taste and affordability of equal education for boys and girls. Such a mindset

of these new women resonates with Bourdieu's (1990:139) concept of 'misrecognition' and 'symbolic violence' which describes the process whereby upper-class taste, manners and education are perceived as indicative of "natural" aptitude, achievement and refinement'. Thus new women legitimize their power over other women, in this case poor and rural women, misrecognizing differences in economic and cultural capital as difference in relation to taste for 'open-mindedness' as well. The private (home)-public (work) boundary also anchored the respondents' narratives of those who are new women and those who are not. Only A1 showed a woman within the home learning English through her mobile phone, while all the other three advertisements showed women in either both home and workplaces, or outdoors engaged in activities like travelling and shopping etc. All respondents identified the woman in A1 as a homemaker and not a new woman. Some acknowledged that the homemaker in A1 had the potential of becoming a new woman, as she was trying to acquire a skill (the cultural capital of fluency in English) which could help her attain a job in future. So participants measured new womenness in close association with the ability to convert cultural capitals into other kinds of capitals and having a job in the public sphere. This is explained by 32- year-old Complete who is a senior researcher at a development organization and also a television show host:

'The fact that she (character in A1) is not happy being just a housewife and wants to gain new qualifications gives her the potential of finding a job and becoming a new woman. But most housewives are not like her. The housewives I know, particularly upper-class housewives, are happy spending their time at home or in leisure in beauty parlours...I know thousands of housewives like that who are not interested in utilizing their education to do something for themselves.' (Complete, 32)

In order to achieve new womenness women must convert their existing capitals, such as the cultural capital of education, into economic capital such as income from a profession, through which they can legitimize their class privilege. In this research I contend this as an investment in themselves and their families. Such projects of self-improvement through a particular composition of cultural resources, impacts a person's subjectivity, their class position and respectability. Complete also disassociates herself from those, particularly upper-class women, who remain within the private sphere of the home, despite being educated. Upper-class homemakers are assumed to be wasting their capabilities and potential in futile pursuits such as treatments in beauty parlours, and thus are not perceived as new women. Disassociation with the upper class's unnecessary consumption pattern and materialism has been identified as a middle-class status symbol, and a source of respectability in South Asian countries like India, which is applicable here for Bangladeshi middle-class new women as well. Thus while investing on the self through education and profession is constructed as a symbol (symbolic capital) of new womenness and a sign of their respectability, the upper-class's conspicuous and needless spending in beauty parlours is constructed as inappropriate for the development of new women's identities and possibilities.

Thirty-nine-year-old Flower holds a directorial position in a local NGO and her husband originates from an upper-class family. She distinguishes herself from other women of her husband's family:

‘I am married to one of the largest business families in Bangladesh and they are extremely conservative when it comes to their women working outside the home. They have to maintain an identity which says wealthy women should

not work; I am far away from that identity. I come from a very progressive and pro-women family, my outlook on my many roles in life and my wealthy in-laws' outlook on women's roles are very different....' (Flower, 39)

Flower identifies herself as a new woman, coming from a middle-class progressive and pro-women family, different from conservative upper-class women in her husband's family. While new women play multiple roles in society both at home and work, upper-class women confine themselves within the home. This may be because upper-class women want to demonstrate their distinction or 'taste of luxury', legitimizing their dominant class position and to establish that women who work do so due to their 'taste of necessity' (Bourdieu, 1992). I will elaborate on a similar response of participants to working-class or poor women in the boundaries of profession section of this chapter.

However, familial duties of a homemaker were not completely overlooked by the new women participants. Despite the women in A3 and A4 resembling some qualities of new womanhood, they were not identified as new women as it was unclear if they also maintained familial responsibilities or took part in domestic work. Manager of a foreign donor agency, 33-year-old Flora explained:

'...she (character in A3) seems independent and confident. She moved around several places freely and comfortably, just like any independent modern women of more developed Western countries. The only thing I will add to it is that the new woman also has to be morally very strong and know her responsibilities. The woman in A3 is unmarried and it is unclear if the women

in A4 are married or not. When independent women can manage their household and workplaces together they become a new woman.’ (Flora, 33)

Flora emphasizes women’s comfortable and independent movement between private and public spheres as a key characteristic of new womanhood. This resonates with existing definitions of Bangladeshi new women who are identified as young professional women who are progressive, global, cosmopolitan subjects who can navigate multiple localities (both home and work, and local and global) with ease and authority (Chowdhury, 2010; Azim, 2007). However, participants emphasize that new womenness is achieved through creating a ‘balance’ between the public and the private sphere. New women have to be morally strong, which is associated with family duties within the home, at the same time they need to be ‘independent’, which is discussed in reference to ‘Western modern’ women’s independence and confident and easy mobility in the public sphere. As the characters in the advertisements were mostly single, Flora’s comment expanded the idea of new womanhood to married women and identified new women as those who maintain a 50-50 public-private/ work-home life balance as opposed to prioritizing one over the other. This balance of work-home life is explained by 40-year-old Life who is a senior executive architect and 34-year-old Hope who is the country manager of a multinational accounting company:

‘We are the new women who want to do everything right. We want to maintain our house perfectly and also do our work the best we can. This way even if we are not perfect in either area, we still have some balance. This often stresses us out, but it also helps us avoid the risk of losing either side.’ (Life, 40)

‘...at the end of a busy working day when I return home with groceries I actually feel proud that I am performing so many different roles for my family. Whereas my husband just goes to work and comes home. At work I am in charge of an entire country program, at home I am a mother, a wife, a daughter and a daughter-in-law. If my husband says he has a bad headache I do not get annoyed rather I offer to press his head for him. Also I am much attached to my parents, every morning I wake up and call my mother to have a chat before starting the day. All these roles give me satisfaction, and make me a morally strong new woman.’ (Hope, 34)

New women must possess the knowledge and capability to maintain both home and work responsibilities. Hope’s satisfaction from her multiple roles both within the home and at work is identified as constitutive of her identity as a respectable (moral) yet professional and progressive new woman. The relationship between home and work is played out in the new women’s choice, knowledge and ability to manage both worlds. This can be identified as a form of ‘adjustment’ and new women’s distinctive ‘taste’ of negotiation and legitimization of a new form of respectability over historically rooted norms of putting family before work. In this research I identify this knowledge of how to attain a 50-50 work-home life balance as a cultural capital, derived of their middle-class habitus, which establishes that new women cannot ‘risk’ losing either their family (marital family) or career. While losing the family will cause loss of moral respectability, losing the job will cause loss of economic and cultural capital, which distinguishes new women as progressive global professional women. This knowledge of how to maintain a 50-50 work-home life balance allows new women to ‘fit in’ within the boundaries of respectability measured in relation to women’s gendered roles within the family, particularly marital family.

However, it is important to note that four participants of this research are single. When I asked the single participants' opinion about most participants' identifying of new women as married in order to achieve a 50-50 work-home life balance, 35- year-old Senior Research Officer of a development agency Modernity said:

‘Well I know marriage and children brings about a lot of additional responsibilities for women which I may not have now. A perfect balance of family and career is extremely difficult for married women and mothers. If I was married I would have liked to achieve that balance...and it's not like I do not have any family responsibilities, or I do not face any family problems now. I do not think there should be any generalization of new women to be married and mothers.’ (Modernity, 35)

Like Modernity, other single participants also recognized that although it is harder for married women and mothers to achieve a 50-50 work-home life balance, they did not think marriage and motherhood were essential aspects of women's lives in order to be new women. I will discuss this further in chapter eight. Overall participants' accounts of special boundaries identify urban habitus as opposed to rural origin and the practice of a 50-50 work-home life balance as constitutive elements of their new womanhood and respectability. And this 50-50 balance is a site of negotiation of the normative conceptions of respectability²⁶ in contemporary South Asia which assumes that

²⁶ Here, I refer to respectability as a practice, rather than a symbolic capital. It is a practice as a 50-50 work-home balance can only be achieved through negotiating with the normative ideology of respectability in relation to women's familial role, at an interactional level through ongoing negotiations. In the last section of this chapter I also refer to smart dressing as a practice of respectability.

middle-class women will prioritize their family above careers (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Fernando and Cohen, 2013).

Educational Boundaries: High Quality Education, Low Quality Education, Bilingual, Single Language Proficiency

Respondents also put emphasis on the distinction of higher education for new women. Higher education was used as recognition of the ‘project of self-improvement’ and a sign of meritocracy to establish new women’s dominant position in a classed society. Thirty-eight-year-old Integrity is an Associate Professor and explains the importance of education for new women:

‘Education is a tool for women’s empowerment. Particularly post-secondary education is a very important means for women to learn to make a stand of their own in a patriarchal society. It makes women self-reflexive about their choices. It is an absolute necessity for your new women.’ (Integrity, 38)

Integrity stresses the value that is attached to education as a form of cultural capital and a source of distinction or legitimization of new womanhood, in relation to women taking a stand for themselves in a patriarchal society. But post-secondary education for girls in Bangladesh is reliant upon class, affordability, social and religious constraints.²⁷ Integrity misrecognizes those women who do not have post-secondary education, as she assumes that such level of education is accessible to all women and does not consider the wider social, cultural and economic constraints that may prevent women from attaining education. While in colonial India new women’s higher education made them ideal companions to their husbands, today Bangladeshi women’s

²⁷ Female education up to secondary level, up to grade 10, is free in Bangladesh.

higher education contributes to their increased visibility and participation in the public sphere. In contemporary Bangladesh Karim (2012) demonstrated that middle-class women's increased participation in higher education, often through travelling to foreign countries, helps them attain financially secure jobs and is eventually having an impact on their articulation and practices of respectability in relation to public/private roles. Thus the cultural capital of education is an important aspect of new womanhood which enables them to rearticulate their position in society in relation to respectable yet progressive women.

In A3 and A4 the women characters were represented as an architect, a doctor and a teacher, all of which illuminate their higher-level educational background. On the other hand in A1 the homemaker is represented to be learning English, which is a quality one can learn from a high school level of education in Bangladesh. As the character in A1 had to learn English as an adult it automatically meant that she did not have higher education, but as she was attempting, or rather choosing, to self-improve through learning English in her adult life, she was considered a 'promising' candidate for achieving new womanhood. In terms of the rural woman in A2, participants read her rural background as suggestive of the fact that she may not have a good level of education, and thus did not identify her as a new woman. Thirty-two-year-old Manager of an NGO, Butterfly, reasoned:

‘...because villages do not have good schools or any universities through which women like her (the character in A2) could acquire the necessary qualification to access professional opportunities and become a new woman.’
(Butterfly, 32)

Similarly 35- year-old Modernity responded to A1 saying:

‘It’s promising to see that although she (the homemaker in A1) did not have access to good education to be able to speak in English, now that she can afford to acquire this skill she is trying her best.’ (Modernity, 35)

Participants had clear boundaries revolving around the quality of education, which were expressed through higher education and proficiency in English. It appears that the participants misrecognize that any woman who has access to and is able to afford ‘good’ education will automatically attain it. By misrecognizing the characters in A1 and A2, Modernity and Butterfly claim their distinction of new womanhood through access and affordability of ‘good’ education, which is symbolic of their class privilege. However, Modernity acknowledges the self-aspiration of the woman in A1 with positive recognition such as ‘promising’. This acknowledgement recognizes the self-improvement narrative of the advertisement whereby cultural properties such as fluency in English language is accrued to the self and is institutionalized to produce a specific form of personhood – in this case a characteristic of new womanhood. Investment in the self is a sign of new women’s progressiveness in contemporary Bangladesh.

A3 does not have any dialogue between the characters, but the background song is partly in English and the music is also Western. A4 also shows its women characters using English in their communication. Life said:

‘It is great to see how we have become more accustomed to speaking in English today. Our lives have become so global with foreign travel and exposure to

people from Western countries even in Dhaka, it is imperative for us to be fluent in English.'

In Life's quote her reference to 'us' stands for new women of Bangladesh. For Life it's not just higher education, but the ability to communicate in a global language like English that is associated with the distinction of new women. Women like Life who work for multinational companies have to travel abroad for work and also have to work with colleagues who are from English-speaking countries. However, Life's reference to global travel and socializing with Western people as signs of new womenhood needs to be read carefully, because the character in A1 demonstrates her ability to communicate in English with Westerners, but she is still not identified as a new woman. This may be due to two reasons, first due to her inability to access or afford English education in her childhood, when new women would acquire this skill, or other factors such as aesthetics or homemaker status.

The right level, or 'good' educational background was also discussed with reference to foreign education. Fourteen out of the twenty-one participants attained higher education and lived in a Western country from one year to ten years, and one was born and raised in the USA and moved back to Bangladesh after marriage. 'Exposure' became a keyword when discussing an international level of education. Exposure to Western ways of life, to the knowledge that participants could live alone in a foreign country and the different opportunities that are available to both men and women in various countries, were deemed an educational process for new women. Foreign education is much more expensive than national level education. Thus for a family to be able to afford to send their daughter to a foreign, mostly Western country, means they have to be financially affluent. Some participants also acquired state scholarships

like Commonwealth or other government funding for further education. These scholarships and funding are highly competitive. To obtain these one must have a very good educational and professional track record in Bangladesh, which is a sign of meritocracy. Thus foreign education is only accessible to those who are rich in economic capital (to pay for it themselves), or those who are rich in cultural capital (to acquire funding through meritocracy). Freedom is a 35-year-old Governance Advisor to USAID Bangladesh and studied and lived in Canada for two years:

‘While in Dhaka I went to one of the best girls schools and then studied in a private university. Finally I went to Canada for my Master’s because I did very well in university and was offered partial funding by a Canadian university. A lot of girls around me have foreign education; it is an investment one can easily make these days if she wants to excel in life...for me that exposure taught me that I can handle any situation on my own. Those who have not seen the world outside Bangladesh lack this exposure which can have a life-changing effect on them. They only see mothers toiling in the house and friends dreaming about getting married. When a girl is taken out of her comfort zone and put into a completely foreign setting, competing with other men and women with an international level of qualifications, she learns how to survive in adverse situations confidently.’ (Freedom, 35)

Freedom had the necessary cultural capital of a good education in Bangladesh to attain a scholarship at a Canadian university. She also sees her foreign education as an investment in her future and an investment in reproducing her class through the project of self-improvement. She clearly disassociates herself from those who do not have such exposure, thus have not developed the confidence to change their lives by coming

out of housework and dreams of marriage, which are considered gendered stereotypical roles. Thus foreign education to Freedom takes social meaning not only through its merit as a cultural capital on its own, but from the way it enables particular practices of distinction between confident, progressive new women and other women who only dream of getting married or toil in the home.

However, six of the participants do not have foreign degrees. Although several of them travel to foreign countries, both Western and Eastern for professional or tourism purposes. Thus I do not construct education in a Western country as a necessary cultural capital for new women. Still, the ability to speak English and a good quality education (whether in Bangladesh or abroad) are certainly important cultural capitals which constitute participants' new womanhood in urban Bangladesh today.

Professional Boundaries: Long-term Career, Short-term Financial Necessity, High-paid Jobs, Low-paid Jobs

Respondents identified the urban professional women represented in A3 and A4 as closely resembling new womanhood. In the advertisements they are employed in either highly-paid jobs (architect and doctor) or highly-respected jobs (teacher) and their economic and/or cultural capital is visible from their various dispositions, such as clothing, cars, houses etc. Respondents identified the rural woman in A2 working in Dhaka city as someone from a working-class background who, despite having a job, is not a new woman, as her job seems low paid and ordinary which she will not be able to continue after marriage. Butterfly explained:

‘...they (rural working-class women) end up going back to their family duties once they get married and have children. Their inability to attain good jobs in

Dhaka means once they have a family it's better for them to stay home and take care of children rather than staying away from home to earn a nominal income.' (Butterfly, 32)

Butterfly's comment identifies that although rural working-class women are sometimes able to cross boundaries of rural-urban spaces and home and workplaces, they lack the cultural capital of a good educational background, which limits them to low-paid jobs. Butterfly misrecognizes working-class women by stating that low-paid jobs can be taken up by any women to meet temporary economic necessity, thus it does not add respectability to women's position in society, and eventually they are forced go back to their domestic roles. But new women's highly-paid jobs based on their cultural capitals of education are a more respectable profession for new women, which legitimizes their career as a choice, something they have earned for themselves and a 'taste of distinction' enabling them to continue their careers after childbirth. They are able to afford childcare and domestic help facilities (explained in the special boundaries section) through their economic capital derived from their jobs, which help them compensate for their domestic roles, combining respectability (through not entirely abandoning family) and progressiveness (through highly-paid professions) together. This will be further discussed in chapter seven.

Another pattern observed in participants' responses was that working-class women have to work in menial low-paid jobs to economically support their families rather than by choice. Modernity responded to A2 saying:

'This ad actually makes me sad. The village girl looks so sad and worn out when she returns to her hostel. She also misses her family and cannot be in

touch regularly because she cannot afford a mobile phone. And to tell you the truth although many rural women come to Dhaka for work, most rural families still want to marry their daughters off rather than send them to the city to work. This ad portrays the struggle of rural women rather than the new women.’ (Modernity, 35)

Rural women’s profession is considered a ‘necessity’ to tackle the poverty of their families; and not a career of choice. Their lack of qualification to attain a higher-paid, reputable job adds to the process of differentiating them from the new women who choose their careers and possess the required capitals like higher education to acquire these careers, rather than needing a job to survive. In the spatial boundaries section of this chapter I indicated the misrecognition of new women by upper-class women of Bangladesh who do not participate in paid employment to demonstrate that their families are too wealthy to require their women to work. As upper-class women misrecognize middle-class women, in the same ways here new women misrecognize the rural/working-class women. But participants also use their choice of careers in highly-paid jobs as a symbol of their distinction from both working-class and upper-class women. While working-class women work as a means to meet financial necessity, upper-class women are perceived to confine themselves in familial roles wasting their capitals of education (argued in the spatial boundaries section). Complete says:

‘A3 and A4 shows the urban version of A2, women who are well educated, have better jobs, earn more money and are so much more confident in their attitude. They are the modern new women who we see around us every day

who are making their families proud of their achievements. They are no different from the Western professional women.’ (Complete, 32)

Urban new women are able to increase their family’s status by legitimizing their pre-existing cultural capitals to attain jobs with high economic return and status value. Good jobs are measured through high salary, the reputation of the organizations they work for and the positions they hold in these organizations. Urban professional new women are compared to Western professional women, to demonstrate how their dispositions are global and cosmopolitan. Thus new women refer to their similarities to Western women in relation to professionalism and progressiveness.

However, participants did not think education, profession and income provided completely unrestricted autonomy to all middle-class women. Life comments on the topic:

‘The thing is those of us who are doing well in our jobs, have mid to upper level positions in well-known organizations and earn substantially, easily get our husband and family’s support in doing things that best suit us. Despite being from the same class background, those who do not have these may not have the same flexibility as we do.’ (Life, 40)

Thus all middle-class working women are not new women. Those who possess the cultural capital of mid-level positions in well-known organizations, can add substantial economic capital to their families, can negotiate for an enabling situation for them to maintain a job after having children and can symbolically authorize their family’s class privilege are considered new women. In contemporary urban Bangladesh it is the type of job and the associated economic and cultural capitals that

makes a difference in the acceptability of women's career outside the home. Jobs that have a higher economic return, at prestigious organizations work as a distinctive status symbol for families. Thus new women's jobs have to be identified as respectable, carrying high economic and cultural returns, to attain the image of a progressive global professional new woman.

Butterfly's experience gives some insight into the matter:

'Right after finishing my undergrad I got an internship at a NGO. But since the office was quite far from my home and the pay was nominal I was often discouraged by my in-laws to continue my internship. However, now that I hold a managerial position in a well-reputed NGO, and earn enough to afford to buy my own car and pay for my child's nursery, they no longer oppose my job, in fact they show off about my work to others all the time.' (Butterfly, 32)

Butterfly's mid-level managerial position, the reputation of her organization and higher economic return adds value to her middle-class social status and is considered more respectable as it is based on her merit and is not a temporary, low-paid, disposable position, and thus is easily accepted by her family. However, not all high-paid jobs are considered respectable either. This is illuminated in Free Spirit's comment, whose career change from a development organization to a local advertising and public relations company caused concern in her family:

'When I was getting married, my well-educated in-laws appreciated my employment with Plan UK, which is a reputed international organization. They were quite proud of me working for an international organization earning as much as their own son. But when I joined this public relations position, which

required me to put in long working hours, to take clients out for dinners and attend social events outside office hours, I started noticing that my family did not appreciate my career as much anymore. Not just my in-laws, my own parents and extended family also disapproved of my job. I think certain Western practices such as staying out till late at night, attending Western style parties with mostly male clients, practices of alcohol consumption and going dancing are still considered inappropriate for Bangladeshi women. And respectable women are discouraged from working in corporate jobs that require them to partake in Western practices.’ (Free Spirit, 34)

Free Spirit’s experience can be related to the previously discussed post-colonial and nationalist understanding of middle-class women whose position was considered superior to Western women as they avoided free mixing of men and women in the public sphere. In the 1980s the state saw men and women’s proximity at the workplaces, especially outside office hours, as immoral and the cause of scandalous sexual chaos among communities which was unacceptable in Bangladesh (Kabeer, 1991). In addition as practices such as alcohol consumption are prohibited in Islam, engaging in these practices is considered inappropriate for respectable women. As a result, jobs that required women to participate in practices that are labelled ‘Western’ or are against the nationalist and religious beliefs of Bangladesh can cause loss of respectability for new women.

But in this research I will demonstrate that although new women’s families may disapprove of Western-style workplaces, change is underway in relation to the types of jobs women are able to attain. After Bangladesh’s neoliberal turn in the 1990s this mindset is changing. This is visible in the fact that the majority of participants in this

research work for such corporate businesses and are used to participating in Western practices in their workplaces. As explained by Rao and Hossain (2012) the nature, position, title of work and its economic return influence particular social groups' classification of work as 'degrading' or 'respectable'. The economic return provides an opportunity for upward mobility in society, while the organization's reputation and the designation of the employee are associated with social respect (ibid.:415–421). The high economic return of participants' Western-style jobs allows them to introduce flexible notions of respectability in their community whereby they draw a boundary between their professional Western practices and private cultural practices. This will be further explored in chapters seven and eight of this thesis. Thus participants identify the cultural and economic capitals derived from their long-term highly-paid jobs as constitutive of their distinction of new womanhood.

Aesthetic Boundaries: 'Smart' Clothes, 'Traditional' Bengali Clothes, Conservative Religious Clothes and Sexual Western Clothes

As the new women responded to the advertisements, their boundary work in relation to aesthetic or clothing practices appeared most nuanced and complex. Participants both drew from and sought distinction from clothing practices identified as upper-class, middle-class, working-class and Western through the advertisements²⁸. Participants merge the boundaries of various classed, cultural and religious clothing practices to construct 'smart' clothing practices as a distinctive practice of new women. I articulate new women's smart dressing as an embodied cultural capital and a site of negotiation of their identities and practices of respectability and progressive

²⁸ An overview of various clothing practices of Bangladeshi women is provided in Appendix 8.

new women. I outline the characteristics of smart dressing through participants' responses to the advertisements.

Flora responds to A2 which shows a village woman in a traditional style sari:

‘See only the village girl working in the city is always wearing a simple cotton sari with long-sleeved blouse and minimal make-up and jewelry. You don’t really find young working women in Dhaka city in such get-up on an everyday basis! It is just inconvenient to wear a sari every day to work. It is now an occasion wear among the urban professional women. And we have also glamorized it quite a bit with stylized blouses, trendy make-up and matching accessories’. (Flora, 33)

Thirty-five-year-old Deputy Manager of a telecommunications company Brave responds to A2:

‘...her hairstyle, the way she wears the sari is very traditional like how women from our mothers’ generation used to wear saris. This could be because village girls are more conservative than urban professional women. I mean just compare her with the urban housewife in a sari, her blouse is stylized, has shorter sleeves, she has more make-up on although she is at home, is wearing gold jewellery, her hair is shorter and styled in Western fashion. She is just not as plain looking as the village girl! I guess it’s a class thing too isn’t it?’ (Brave, 35)

The statements above illustrate two things, first how participants distinguish traditional clothing practices from modern ones mainly through stylization. Stylization

of Bengali cultural clothes signifies ‘modernity’ and wealth as well as convenience of certain attires over others in terms of mobility. The signs of stylization of cultural clothes are associated with mixing Western and less conservative clothing styles by the homemaker character in A1 as opposed to the traditional style sari of the rural woman in A2. Comparisons are made in relation to A1’s short-sleeved blouse as opposed to A2’s long-sleeved conservative, traditional ones, make-up vs no make-up, and Western inspired stylized hairstyles like short, straight hair with fringes (very short layer on the forehead) as opposed to long, uncut hair styled in a bun. In addition, the class aspect of it is also visible from the mention of matching jewellery, or gold jewellery, better and more expensive saris rather than simple cotton ones and use of make-up as opposed to no make-up. Stylization of the sari is identified as the ‘modern’, thus smart way of wearing it, mixing Bengali cultural clothes with Western aspects, and a sign of progressiveness and modernity of new womenness.

Second, the Bengali cultural attire of sari is identified as an ‘occasion wear’ by Flora, who thinks it is inconvenient to wear a sari on a regular basis for a professional women. This is a change, from post-colonial understanding of Bengali middle-class women’s realization of middle-class respectability through sari. Through the sari, respectable middle-class *bhodomohila* disassociated themselves from lower-class and West Pakistani women’s practice of Islamic *burqa*.²⁹ Thus Flora’s comment suggests a change in new women’s construction of respectability in clothing practices which is now articulated via convenience as opposed to ‘traditional’ cultural superiority. Wearing a sari on an everyday basis is considered inconvenient or uncomfortable for

²⁹ An enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions. Often black in colour, it covers a woman’s whole body and has a separate headscarf.

new women who use this cultural attire on occasions where representing their cultural heritage is still important. Thus on such occasions, the sari becomes a symbol of new women's culturally attuned respectability, as opposed to 'modern' or Western appearance.

Forty-five-year-old CEO of a marketing research company Caller explains:

'Every time I go to an international event to represent my national office I try to wear a Sari for formal dinners and presentations. I like how one can easily identify my cultural background from just seeing me in a sari. I feel proud of my cultural heritage. But wearing it every day to work in Dhaka restricts my mobility and comfort. I guess we are now spoiled by many different clothing options, in previous generations they did not have so many options so they had to learn to be comfortable and mobile in their saris, but we don't have to do that anymore!' (Caller, 45)

Previous generations of women are referred to as those who wore the sari on an everyday basis; this has an underlining indication that in contemporary Bangladesh those who wear the sari regularly may be perceived as 'traditional' by the new women. In the advertisements, the characters shown in a sari all along were a village girl working in a city in A2 and an urban homemaker in A1, neither of whom were considered a new women by participants. However, this traditional and conservative practice becomes a symbol of Bangladeshi national culture at international events (to distinguish Bengali women from other Western women) and cultural occasions. Thus the sari has varied symbolic meaning in different spaces, and new women have the taste and knowledge of identifying when and where a cultural attire is more suitable

over convenience of other aesthetic practices. This knowledge of context-specific suitability of clothing practices is another integral part of smart dressing. It is through this taste and knowledge of context-specific dressing that new women maintain their classed distinction and respectability, which is articulated in relation to their modern/progressive yet culturally attuned dressing sense.

A4 represented a young woman in a salwar kameez³⁰ which was identified as the most common everyday wear by all 21 participants. However, they also distinguished different stylization of this attire to differentiate between a modern, thus smart and traditional look. For example, short, body-hugging kameez (top), wearing the scarf on one's left shoulder only (which is part of this three-piece attire), using expensive, imported materials was considered a smart way of wearing a salwar kameez. But wearing loose kameez (top), a scarf around one's upper body crisscrossing over one's chest, use of inexpensive materials were considered too traditional and conservative. Complete responded to the character in salwar kameez in A4 saying:

‘Her kameez is no traditional kameez. It is tight fitting, has very short sleeves, her scarf is worn on the side rather than covering her chest which is the traditional and conservative way of wearing it. That's how most of us wear it now. ’ (Complete, 32)

The distinction of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is between new women and other women, whereby new women wear smart salwar kameez and other women (presumably other working-class and middle-class women) may wear traditional and conservative style salwar

³⁰ The salwar kameez is a three part dress consisting of long loose-fitting trousers and a loose-fitting tunic top paired with a scarf which can be worn in various different ways.

kameez. It is interesting to note that these stylizations are often adaptations of clothing practices seen on cable television in Indian or Western shows, as Flora describes:

‘Our clothing practices have changed drastically since the early 90s when we got satellite television for the first time. In fact since then urban Bangladeshi society has become much more tolerant towards women’s careers in the public sphere, relaxing traditional expectations of marriage and childbearing from young women and with it also came the practice of fusion clothing. Young women watched other South Asian and Western women in different kinds of clothes which were often considered too sexualized and they started mixing those with their Bengali clothes. As long as they don’t completely abandon their sense of culture and values and only introduce subtle changes to glamorize their attires these practices are welcomed by all in Dhaka.’ (Flora, 33)

The above statements illuminate how smart attires are key to new women’s fusion/hybrid clothing practices in Bangladesh. New women mix attires labelled as sexual with their Bengali cultural clothes and construct smart dressing as a symbol of their distinct classed taste and aesthetic status quo. Enabled by their economic capital and exposure to foreign media, which is more readily available to the middle class as opposed to the working class, the participants of this research position themselves as progressive, and modern in relation to fusion smart clothing, careful to introduce what Flora calls ‘subtle’ changes, and thus maintaining cultural respectability, as opposed to complete abandonment of cultural values in clothing in favour of sexual/Western clothing.

All 21 participants said they wear Western garb when visiting Western countries. However, fully Western attires are considered too sexual and is not compatible with norms of respectability in Bangladesh. This is illustrated through the fact that 18 of my participants identified the female character in A3, wearing a Western suit and more casual trousers and a shirt, with comments such as ‘hanky panky’, ‘too modern’, ‘inappropriate for Bangladeshi society’ and ‘presumptuous’ and ultimately not a new woman. This shows that completely Western outfits are considered sexualized, immoral and unacceptable in Bangladeshi society, especially among the middle class. In this specific advertisement the protagonist was shown in body hugging and somewhat revealing Western wear. Examples of ‘revealing’ are showing too much skin, showing one’s cleavage, skin tight clothes, showing all the curves of a woman’s body etc. These are considered sexualized representation of women to participants, and they believe new women prefer to dress in less sexualized attires, to maintain their moral and respectable femininity in the public sphere. Overtly sexual and Western dressing is also associated with the upper class. Thirty-eight-year-old Senior Lecturer Happy says:

‘Some young girls from wealthy families think they can imitate the fashion they see on television without any consideration of the society they live in....they buy these western sexualized attires in their travels to Western countries and wear them in Dhaka...it is absolutely inappropriate.’ (Happy, 38)

Boundaries of smart dressing mark overtly Western and sexual fashion as inappropriate, and a practice of wealthy upper-class young women. Thus overtly Western and sexualized fashion is in tension with smart dressing, which has more

subtle sexual connotations. At the same time, there is a tension between the aesthetic practices of young and older women, which I will further explore in chapter six.

One of the woman characters in A4 was represented in a *fatua* (long tunic-like long top) and denim rousers, a mix of Western and Eastern clothes, which is also considered appropriate for new women. As 35-year-old Assistant Professor Instinct says:

‘My students wear them (fusion attire), even I wear them...they are a common fashion practice of modern new women.’ (Instinct, 35)

Mixing of western and eastern garb is considered ‘fashionable’, and a common practice of new women. This is also a way to desexualize parts of Western dressing, such as rather than wearing a short body hugging top and skin tight trousers wearing a long-sleeved shirt and loose trousers, or pairing denim trousers with a long tunic top/fatua and a scarf etc. By associating such mix of eastern and western garb with young and ‘modern’ new women, Instinct automatically distinguishes new women’s fashion from other women.

Only one participant, 34-year-old Nest, practised Islamic Hijab³¹ during the first phase of interviews. By the second phase of interviews another participant, Free Spirit, started practising hijab too. They distinguish their religious attires along the same classifications of smart dressing. They said they practise ‘smart hijab’ by adding a headscarf with their salwar kameez or sari as opposed to wearing the traditional burqa. Occasionally and depending on context (such as when in Western countries) they also

³¹ Hijab in Islam is a state of modesty for women after they cross the age of puberty and not a particular piece of clothing. In this research I use the term to refer to such practice of modesty through wearing loose clothes and adding a headscarf to Bengali cultural attires of sari and salwar kameez and Western style trousers and shirts. I use the word to distinguish the practice of hijab from the previously defined attire of burqa.

add a headscarf with Western-style trousers and tops, still meeting all the requirements of Islamic attire. Free Spirit makes this most explicit:

‘Today women can glamour up their hijab, there are fashionable hijab stores in Dhaka now...a smart hijab gives women the opportunity to maintain a fashionable image and access career opportunities as those who do not wear it. But a plain black burqa may limit women’s access to such opportunities by representing them as conservative and backward.’ (Free Spirit, 34)

Through the concept of smart hijab, Free Spirit emphasizes the agential aspect of aesthetics, which emerges from the identification of new womanhood. New women can access fashionable hijab, maintaining progressive new womanhood through careers. But a ‘plain, black burqa’ is not a sign of progressiveness, rather a sign of ‘conservative and backward’ femininity. Gilbertson (2014) described that strong stereotypes about Muslims are evident in her study of middle-class women’s ‘balance’ of respectability and overt modernity through fashion practices in Hyderabad India. She describes that religious Muslim women were considered less emancipated, less progressive and less ‘open-minded’, thus outside of appropriate/respectable middle-class femininity (ibid.:131). But Free Spirit’s comment suggest an alternative way of practising religious attire, whereby she claims religious modesty and progressive femininity simultaneously through her practice of smart hijab.

Smart clothing is defined by the participants in two ways. Firstly it means mixing two or more aesthetic practices to find a suitable as well as preferred practice for a particular occasion, such as stylizing and sexualizing the sari or desexualizing Western

attires of trousers and top³². Secondly, smart dressing also means context-specific clothing practices, for instance although participants may prefer to wear cultural clothes such as the sari for family occasions or at international functions as a representation of their culture and nation, for everyday wear they choose to wear stylized salwar kameez or a fusion of Western/Eastern attire comprising trousers and long tunic tops like fatua, often simultaneously following their personal taste and organizational aesthetic labour norm. Bourdieu (2008) identifies bodily dispositions of dress code and style as embodied state of cultural capital which individuals mobilize to reproduce class distinction. In addition, I contend that, the knowledge of how to practice smart dressing (how to stylize or what is suitable for what occasion) brings specific symbolic profit to the middle-class and it helps them reproduce class status. This knowledge is not an innate commonsense knowledge, but knowledge acquired through access to certain type of education, profession, global travel and media exposure all of which are part of middle-class habitus and a source of distinction for new women in Bangladesh. Thus new women convert their cultural capital of knowledge about how to practice smart dressing to a symbolic capital, an alternative form of respectable aesthetic practice that authorizes their class privilege³³.

Distancing middle-class appearance from sexual appearance has been a common theme in studies of respectable femininity in Britain where middle-class femininity is

³² By stylizing, participants mainly refer to the use of expensive cloth, embellishment and accessories of jewellery, bags and shoes. Sexualizing often refers to not wearing a scarf with a salwar kameez, or wearing a scarf around the neck rather than to cover the chest area (which is the norm), or tight-fitting clothes, sleeveless or very short sleeves, deep-necked top, short tops and clothes made of see-through materials such as lace or chiffon. Desexualizing Western attire means wearing a long-sleeved shirt and loose trousers, or pairing denim trousers with a long tunic top and a scarf etc.

³³ Bourdieu claims that cultural goods and practices ‘can be appropriated both materially-which presupposes economic capital-and symbolically-which presupposes cultural capital’ (2008:285). In the following chapter I will demonstrate how new women appropriate their cultural capital of knowledge of smart dressing into other capitals in more detail.

expressed through appropriate clothing as opposed to the sexual and vulgar clothing of the working class (Skeggs, 1997). In India, middle-class womanhood is constructed through women's conscious engagement with fashion, cosmetics and beauty regimes and containment of sexuality or 'wayward modernity' as part of being respectable (Thapan, 2009:67). The findings of this research are in line with Thapan's (2009) claim that respectable new women seek to improve their lives and status by autonomous construction of the self through aesthetics, introducing subtle changes to aesthetic practices of respectable Bengali cultural attires or employing context-specific dressing and still maintaining norms of propriety and respectability.

Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrate that new women participants receive media actively, bringing their own perspectives, often critical ones, to the viewing experience. Studies on Bangladeshi media did not acknowledge this aspect of audience response to media materials, nor did they explore how the audience's class background influences their reading of the changing representation of women in advertisements. Participants' responses recognize the importance of polysemic reading of media materials as they identified with some characteristics of the changing women's representations in the advertisements, such as urban lifestyle, education, English language skills, profession and smart dressing, but distanced themselves from others, such as lack of work-home life balance, to construct their identity of new womenness.

The data analysed in this chapter were primarily collected through initial stage of data collection, which marked the beginning of identifying the issues that were important to the participants, indicating areas to follow-up in the rest of the stages of data

collection. As noted in the methodology chapter, the purpose of the preliminary focus group discussion (through responses to the advertisements) was to inform the next stages of interviews thus I used participants own framework of their understanding of their distinction of respectable femininity and new womanhood through special, educational, professional and aesthetic binaries. But to avoid imposing focus group participants' selected criteria on the rest of the participants, I also showed the advertisements to the interview participants to check how they constructed the new woman of Bangladesh. Thus the data examined in this chapter were collected from the focus group discussion and the first phase of face to face interviews.

In this chapter, through participants' self-reflexive responses to the selected advertisements I have indicated how participants construct new womenness in relation to the accrual, conversion and legitimation of various cultural capitals, investment in the self, nuanced construction of boundaries (of the binaries) of class, and finally negotiation of practices of respectability. Not just cultural capitals, but specific levels and forms of cultural capitals were understood to be dominant features of the distinction of affluent middle-class new womanhood, and a symbol of new woman's respectability. For example it is not just education that constitutes participants' distinction, but higher education either in Bangladesh or a Western country, and proficiency in English, which is gained from an education in good schools, that constitutes the distinction of new womenness. Women also convert their cultural capital of education into something more valuable such as highly-paid careers in reputable organizations. While income from these professions adds economic capital, the reputation of their organizations adds further cultural capital to new women's class status. Bourdieu (1992) claims that individuals or families tend to consciously or unconsciously maintain or increase their capitals and consequently maintain or

improve their position in class structure. This strategy depends equally on the composition of capitals and the mechanisms to reproduce them. I have revealed that, depending on participants' access to various levels of capitals, their conversion practices differ. For example, although foreign education is considered a valuable cultural capital, not all participants have foreign education, but all participants manage to attain jobs in reputed organizations. Such diverse ways of claiming distinction suggests that construction of new womanhood is a heterogeneous practice which can facilitate both inter-class and intra-class distinctions. This will be further explored in chapters six to eight.

In particular participants elicited two key sites of negotiation or (re)doing of practices of middle-class respectable femininity to construct the distinction of global professional and progressive new womanhood, they are: 50-50 work-home life balance and smart dressing. Participants construct 50-50 work-home life balance as respectable, as opposed to their perceived notion of working-class women who articulate their respectability in relation to women's duties of wife and motherhood, and upper-class women who construct careers as a 'taste of necessity' and not respectable. Such 50-50 work-home life balance is also contrary to the studies of middle-class respectability in South Asian countries, where middle-class new women still prioritize family over career goals (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Fernando and Cohen, 2013). Particularly new for me was the extensive discussion on clothing practices which was not part of my original inquiry. Participants negotiate aesthetic respectability by merging the boundaries of the middle class's Bengali cultural clothing, the working class's conservative and religious clothing, and upper-class and Western women's sexualized clothing through smart dressing. This is similar to Indian new women literature which demonstrates that oppositional discourses of

tradition/modernity, old/new and local/global can be articulated through new women's submission to and contestation of various embodied practices (Thapan, 2004). I contend that both 50-50 work-home life balance and smart dressing practices can enable participants to reposition themselves by means of inter-class and intra-class dis-identifications. I identify such boundary work or (re)doing of middle-class respectability as a 'tactical deployment' of new women's cultural capital of knowing how to achieve this 50-50 balance and practice smart dressing in order to maintain class distinction. Here knowledge is a cultural capital as it adds cultural properties, such as different embodiment practices and new ways of performing familial duties, which is accrued to the self and can be institutionalized in familial and professional fields. In this research I will explore these processes of institutionalization of participants' knowledge of how to (re)do practices of respectability in chapters six to eight.

I also want to clarify that participants (re)doing of respectability does not mean abandonment of historically-rooted patterns of middle-class women's symbolic role within the home and aesthetic moral propriety. Rather it highlights new women's individual navigations that introduce alternative forms of respectable practices, balancing progressiveness and respectability among new women of Bangladesh. However, there are some missing elements in the participants' discussions presented in this chapter. For example, participants imagine new women to be married (and possibly also have children) as they evaluate their negotiation for a 50-50 work-home life balance. Four participants of this research are single and six do not have children. In chapters seven and eight I will discuss this discrepancy in participants' articulation of new womanhood according to their marital and motherhood status. In relation to smart aesthetics, participants' comments put new women at the centre of decision

making about the disavowal of overtly sexual and religious practices and construction and display of smart aesthetic practices. At the initial stage of data collection, participants did not refer to their families or workplaces as having any impact on their smart dressing practices. In the next chapter, I delve further into the consequent stages of data collection to explore the practice of smart dressing to study the roles new women's work organizations and associated aesthetic labour norms play in the construction of smart dressing as a mechanism of (re)doing of respectability in urban Bangladesh.

Chapter 6: (Re)doing Respectability in the Workplace: Smart Dressing and Aesthetic Labour

Introduction

This chapter analyses how new women's workplaces influence their (re)doing³⁴ of respectable femininity in relation to smart dressing. In chapter five, I indicated that smart dressing is a defining characteristic of new womenness, through which participants merge the boundaries of respectable Bengali cultural clothing practices of sari and salwar kameez with working-class women's religious practice of the hijab and elite and Western women's more 'sexualized' Western garb. In this chapter I add organizational aesthetic³⁵ labour standards to this already complex boundary work of new women in relation to sartorial choices.

Historically normative respectable attires of Bengali middle class women were considered to be the nationalist sari, but in contemporary Bangladesh the salwar kameez has become a widespread practice, particularly among the younger generation. Sabur (2010) claims that the middle class invest considerable money on clothing to maintain and display a neoliberal middle-class lifestyle, but she provides no further elaboration of respectable clothing practices. Research in India and Nepal indicates that middle-class women reconcile with and make use of contradictory cultural, religious and classed aesthetic practices, arising from rapidly changing social structures in urban spaces (Gilbertson, 2014; Talukdar and Linders, 2013; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase, 2008; Tarlo, 1996; Thapan, 2004, 2009; Liechty, 2003). They do

³⁴ As identified in chapter two, by (re)doing I refer to conformation, negotiation and transgression of normative conceptions of middle-class respectability.

³⁵ I use the term aesthetic to mean clothing or dressing practices.

so through finding a ‘good balance’ between respectable national cultural clothes and fashionable western clothes (Gilbertson, 2014) and by following multiple clothing norms in diverse locations of work and home (Thapan, 2009; Liechty, 2003). Although the Indian and Nepali literature suggests a conflict between the expectations of cultural attire from middle-class families and the demands for Western dressing by neoliberal workplace cultures, it does not expand on this issue. I draw on the concept of aesthetic labour (Witz et al, 2003; Warhurst et al, 2000) to show the various ways in which Bangladeshi new women’s jobs in three types of service sector organizations – corporate businesses, public and educational institutes and NGOs and development organizations – influence their (re)doing or negotiation with normative conceptions of the respectable sari and salwar kameez. I demonstrate that new women are keenly aware of the various aesthetic options available to them, due to their participation in the global economy, their age and experience of living in foreign countries, and these factors influence how they negotiate smart dressing. Thus participants’ (re)doing of respectability in response to organizational aesthetic norms is complex, nuanced and heterogeneous in terms of whether they conform, negotiate or transgress. This chapter answers a subsection of my second research question: *how do the new women (re)do respectable femininity in the context of workplaces?*

Considering Bangladeshi new women’s increased participation in paid employment, it is important to explore how organizational aesthetic standards influence their smart dressing. In chapter two, I have defined aesthetic labour in terms of organizations requiring employees to assume a particular type of embodied practice, such as clothing, transforming this embodied disposition into ‘skills’ which produces the identity of the aesthetic labourer. Warhurst and Nickson (2009) contend that aesthetic labour is multi-faceted, resulting not just from formal management control but equally

from informal and implicit expectations from management and colleagues, and I will explore these informal and implicit aesthetic labour standards. Aesthetic labour is an embodied aspect of ‘professionalism’, a form of cultural capital that can be converted to other forms of capitals (such as economic capital as income) to reproduce social class by employees. An organization’s brand is aimed at particular social groups and seeks to appeal to their senses, thus it is capable of adding cultural and symbolic value to the target customer and the employees, creating ‘lifestyles’ that mark differences of class and status (Pettinger, 2004:171). I argue that new women (re)do normative conceptions of middle-class respectability through negotiating for smart dressing practices to be an alternative form of respectable aesthetic practice. Their workplaces play an important role in their self-construction of new womanhood, to the degree that women are able to evaluate the costs and benefits involved in converting their cultural capital of smart dressing into the economic capital of income or the symbolic capital of global professionals and because organizations may discipline employees who fail to perform the required aesthetic labour.

I start the chapter by providing an overview of participants’ smart dressing practices. In the next section I discuss how participants’ workplaces influence their smart dressing choices. First, the *corporate business* sector requires employees to conform to smart aesthetic labour norms, some of which may be discriminatory towards participants’ religious clothing practices. Second, in *public and educational institutes*, participants generally conform to organizational aesthetic norms and respectability norm simultaneously by wearing conventional style Bengali cultural attires while younger participants perform context-specific smart dressing and one participant is able to transgress the organizational aesthetic norm altogether. Third, in *NGOs and development organizations* participants generally engage in context-specific smart

dressing and one participant shows ambivalence towards peer pressure to conform to organizational aesthetic labour standards. Overall aesthetic labour norms in corporate organizations, participants' age and experience of living in a western country enable them to negotiate with aesthetic respectability through practice of stylized sari and salwar kameez, mix of eastern and Western garb and occasional or regular use of western garb. Only those participants who work in public and educational institutes simultaneously conform to organizational aesthetic labour norm and respectability norm in Bangladesh by wearing conventional style sari and salwar kameez only.

Hybridization of Clothing and Fashion in Post-colonial Societies

Today as postcolonial societies encounter the capitalist forces of globalization, hybridization of their national culture in terms of clothing and fashion is a common practice across the world. Rapid economic growth and the demand of new labour resources into the job market ultimately had an ideological effect on economic modernization through women's clothing practices. In many postcolonial countries women's experience of modernity is often parallel with Western fashion. In China, globalization increased the popularity and availability of Western style clothes for women while at the same time traditional areas such as tailoring attracted less and less apprentices making China's national dress *cheongsams* very expensive for working class women to afford. Additionally the proliferation of Western retailers in the country resulted in arbitrary acceptance of 'the West' and 'the good' which represents the ideological apparatus of the economic hegemony of Western countries through the process of globalization (Chan, 2000:302). Similarly in India in the late 1980s and early 1990s capitalist advertising started representing women in a different form of their national attire of a sari which now represented western notion of *haute couture*

or highly fashionable than the ones in the past. Additionally Indian women were also represented in track suits, jeans, skirts and dresses choosing their own brand of cigarettes, method of contraception and domestic appliances (Loomba, 1997:287). The spectre of westernization and deculturalization still remains a major concern for the Hindu right who continues to protest against holding beauty contests in India with Bikini rounds. However, Indian or western clothing *per se* is no longer the privileged or a rigid signifier of the line between 'us' and 'them', partly because of the changes within even right-wing rhetoric of Indian-ness and femininity especially in the media. A trouser-clad woman may be traditional inside, and in fact there are strenuous efforts to depict this as not just a possible but a desirable image, both in the media as well as in films. Moreover, such redefinition resonates strongly with the influx of 'global' cosmetics and clothing firms into the Indian market, and with the shifts within the indigenous fashion industry (ibid:289).

In countries like Singapore fashion choices of women in modern time appear much more hybrid. In the 1990s as the affluence of Singapore's population started being associated with their Confucian values of hard work, education, pragmatism and family cohesion, professional Chinese women started using their traditional dress *cheongsams* as a form of power dressing to represent their Chinese values in formal occasions where there is a government and ministerial presence, or where displays of power and official ideology are apparent. Wearing the *cheongsam* is an affirmation of Chinese Singaporean women's national ideology (Beng-Huat, 2000:283). With the increasing visibility of Chinese *cheongsam*, the Malay dress of *kerbaya* (tight fitting, long-sleeved top that drapes over the hips) disappeared and Islamic dress *baju kurong* (a many layered loose garment that obscure the hint of the body form, a modified short veil somewhat resembling the nun's wimple) became the central identity marker of

Malay ethnicity form Muslim Malay women in Singapore (ibid.: 284). Thus it cannot be said that there is a single cultural flow from the West to the east which dominates hybrid fashion cultures in various countries. Hybrid fashion of postcolonial societies are influenced by a variety of aspects and women today have developed a heightened sense of self-consciousness about representing their identities in changing societies. And such ‘technologies of the self’ which permits individuals by their own means or with the help of others to introduce operations on their bodies and souls to transform themselves (Foucault, 1988) is the agenda of this chapter.

Smart Dressing Practices of Participants

As noted in chapter five, most participants made it clear that their clothing practices no longer resemble the traditional and conservative style worn by middle-class women of previous generations and lower-class or rural women today (for an overview of various clothing styles in Bangladesh, see Appendix 8). During the first phase of interviews 18 participants said that they wear stylized salwar kameez as everyday attire for work and wear the sari as formal attire for work and family functions. For those in corporate organizations and those in NGOs and development organizations their smart dressing also included occasional or regular (depending on age) use of Western styles, such as trousers with a short top. One participant, Nest (34), adds a headscarf to her stylized sari and salwar kameez. By the time of the second phase of interviews, Free Spirit (34) (one of the 18 participants practising smart aesthetics) had also started wearing smart hijab, by adding a headscarf with salwar kameez, sari or loose trousers, shirt and a shrug. I categorize Free Spirit and Nest as practising smart dressing too as they stylize their hijab and wear Western clothes when in Western countries. Three of the remaining participants, all working in public and educational

institutes, wear traditional style sari and salwar kameez or sari when in Dhaka. Indeed all 21 participants wear western garb when they travel abroad to Western countries, but some avoid skirts and dresses and only wear trousers and shirts. I contend that such context-specific dressing is a subset of conforming to and a performative aspect of respectability, whereby participants do not entirely challenge the normative conceptions of Bengali aesthetics, but find freedom to experiment with their dressing in contexts where such norms are not imposed on them. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the different aesthetic practices of participants, organized according to their job sectors.

No.	Name of Paritipant	Job Sector	Stylized or Westernized Bengali cultural or Religious attires	Context-Specific Dressing
1	Life	Corporate Business	x	x
2	Indpendent	Corporate Business	x	x
3	Free Spirit	Corporate Business	x	x
4	Hope	Corporate Business	x	x
5	Destiny's Child	Corporate Business	x	x
6	Brave	Corporate Business	x	x
7	Fighter	Corporate Business	x	x
8	Caller	Corporate Business	x	x
9	Informed	Public and Educational		x
10	Happy	Public and Educational		x
11	Decision Maker	Public and Educational		x
12	Nest	Public and Educational	x	x
13	Instinct	Public and Educational	x	x
14	Integrity	Public and Educational	x	x
15	Flora	NGO & Development	x	x
16	Modernity	NGO & Development	x	x
17	Freedom	NGO & Development	x	x
18	Flower	NGO & Development	x	x
19	Singing Bird	NGO & Development	x	x
20	Butterfly	NGO & Development	x	x
21	Complete	NGO & Development	x	x

Table 6.1: Overview of participants' smart dressing practices

(Re)doing Respectability through Smart Dressing

Different organizations have different aesthetic norms and at the same time participants' personal taste in terms of dressing varies according to age and experience of living in a Western country. Thus participants' (re)doing of respectability in response to organizational aesthetic norms cannot always be classified in clear

categories of conformation, negotiation or transgression. Some participants may conform to organizational aesthetic norms, transgressing norms of respectable Bengali cultural attires, while others may transgress organizational aesthetic norms and negotiate with the norms of respectable Bengali attire. In addition, participants working in all three types of organizations made clear that there were no specified aesthetic norms laid out in job advertisements, employment agreements or workplace policies, with the exception of the advertising and PR industry, where job advertisements sometimes mention the dress code as ‘formal’ or ‘smart’. None of the participants reported receiving any training on grooming or mentioned working practices which addressed aesthetic norms or requirements. Thus organizational control over participants’ aesthetics in this research is identified as informal, operating through implicit normative aesthetic standards which can influence participants’ practices of smart dressing.

Corporate Businesses

In this research I categorize corporate businesses as mobile telecommunication companies, public relations (PR) and advertising, architectural firms, manufacturing, marketing etc. Organizations in this sector have the highest salary scale and some of them are multinational in their organizational structure. Eight participants work in the corporate business sector: Life (40), Independent (38), Free Spirit (34), Hope (34), Destiny’s Child (35), Brave (35), Fighter (40) and Caller (45). Participants in this sector are subject to strict aesthetic labour norms, whereby employees are expected to practice smart dressing to emulate the lifestyle and appeal to the senses of their global and affluent clients and customers. Knowledge of smart dressing is a form of cultural capital, which participants convert into the economic capital of a high income. The

discussion also demonstrates that participants in this sector identify with images of global professional women working for big brands, which in turn accrues symbolic value that contributes to their distinctive class status. Hence I argue that participants in this sector conform to organizational aesthetic labour norms and in so doing negotiate with normative conceptions of middle-class respectability in relation to aesthetic practices.

During the first phase of my interviews Free Spirit was working as a manager of a PR and advertising company in Dhaka city:

‘You see, I am a very lazy person and never really bothered much about my appearance. But since I joined this Public Relations (PR) Company, I have had to wine and dine with big corporate clients, take them out to fancy hotels and away days. So I have to dress and look appropriately. I mostly wear modern Bengali wear like a Salwar kameez or Sari, but often also have to wear Western outfits.’ (Free Spirit, 34)

The ‘appropriate’ and ‘modern’ look required in the PR industry is identified in terms of stylization and Westernization of salwar kameez and sari, which I defined as smart dressing in chapter five. The appropriate look also refers to regular use of Western outfits, which refers to the context specific-ness of smart clothing. Free Spirit constructs the PR industry as a client-based business, where the success of the company relies on the employee’s ability to establishing social relations (social capital) with potential customers who have a particular aesthetic lifestyle of their own (cultural capital) to sell the organization’s services (economic capital). Thus the social, cultural and economic means of business come together in such industries. Employees

contribute to the production of image and context for the services being sold through their aesthetics; that is the company image extends from the service, to its employees. Due to the importance of employees' aesthetics in bringing together economic, cultural and social aspects of the business, participants like Free Spirit willingly conform to the aesthetic standard of the PR industry, to fit in with the class and lifestyle niches of 'big clients' and convert their cultural capital of smart dressing to economic capital of income. Such conformation to aesthetic labour norms enables Free Spirit to assume the symbolic image of a global professional woman, and negotiate with norms of middle-class respectable aesthetic practices of maintaining propriety through traditional style Bengali attires.

Corporate aesthetic norms are associated with approachability and confidence of employees, which refer to their aesthetic professionalism as well as corporate culture. When I asked participants if this is made explicit in the job advertisements in this sector, those who worked for the media industry or public relations firms said that the job advertisements sometimes mention the required dress code to be 'smart' or 'formal'. When asked how they interpreted 'smart' and 'formal' dressing, Public Relations Director Destiny's Child said:

'...I am not sure actually! Our everyday clothes like salwar kameez and sari are considered formal wear in this country, though for men it obviously means no jeans or shorts... I think in our public relations offices we need to look approachable to clients and companies. If a female employee dresses too conservatively, like covering her head, some clients may think she is not approachable which may cause loss of clients...I have always worn smart

Bengali clothes. When I was younger I also wore Western clothes occasionally.’ (Destiny’s Child, 35)

Public relations industries uphold their organizational aesthetic standards to match their clients’ lifestyle more explicitly than other industries. The ‘lifestyle’ of the targeted clients in this industry is constituted through elements such as a taste for wining and dining in expensive restaurants, after office hours socializing, secular outlook, approachability etc. which signify the characteristics of global middle-class professionals. Thus these organizations set clear boundaries between those who are conservatively dressed and therefore unsuitable employees, and those who are dressed in a smart and ‘approachable’ manner, thus suitable employees. Hence when participants like Free Spirit and Destiny’s Child tell their stories of conforming to aesthetic professionalism, they negotiate with norms of respectability in the country by assuming the images of global professional new women who introduce smart attires as an alternative form of respectable attire for professional women in the country. These alternative aesthetic practices may be sanctioned due to the high income of participants in the corporate industry, and particularly in the multinational ones. I have argued previously that accrual of economic capital for themselves and their families is an important source of respectability and legitimization of new womanhood. In light of the economic value they gain from their corporate jobs, new women may be more accepting of aesthetic labour norms in this sector.

Participants working in other corporate sectors, like telecommunication, finance, manufacturing, architecture and market research also express that implicit aesthetic labour norms can contribute to social discrimination, given the close connection between appearance and social categories such as Islamic practice of hijab. This is

explained by 38-year-old Independent who is a deputy general manager of a Norwegian telecommunications company in Bangladesh. After observing *Omrah*, which is a religious pursuit of Muslims conducted in Mecca, she started wearing a headscarf or the hijab at work.³⁶ Her immediate superior, a Norwegian man whom she was on very good terms with since she joined the company about nine years ago, inquired why the sudden change in her appearance. Independent explained it was part of her religious pursuit and she was to continue wearing the hijab for 40 days after her *Omrah*. Within these 40 days, Independent got used to the idea of wearing the hijab and as practising Muslim women are supposed to wear the hijab as an everyday practice she decided to continue wearing it after the 40-day period. However, this was not taken so well by her Norwegian superior who gave as his reason that, being the deputy general manager, she represents the Bangladesh office to the rest of the world. A big corporate event was supposed to be held in the Bangladesh office around that time and Independent was in charge of hosting big names in the telecommunication industry from all over the world. This event required her to look confident and professional, and her hijab apparently made her look ‘vulnerable’ and ‘unconfident’. Thus Independent’s superior very clearly asked her to consider taking off her hijab in light of her commitments to the company. This experience of Independent is a significant site to explore how employers of global organizations in Bangladesh may read specific cultural and religious embodiment practices through their Western values.

³⁶ Before starting to practice hijab, Independent’s aesthetic practice consisted of stylized salwar kameez and sari. Afterwards when Independent started practising hijab she added a headscarf to her salwar kameez or sari. In this research I have identified such practice of hijab as smart hijab.

Despite the whole proposition being highly disappointing for Independent, upon discussion with her husband (which involved thinking that if she wanted to continue wearing the hijab she would have to leave her job) she decided to let go of the manifestation of her religious value through clothing practice and conform to the organizational aesthetic norm. She explained:

‘I never understood how an employer can ask an employee who holds such an important position in his organization and is so committed to the company to give up her personal identity. I felt like I was denied my freedom to practise my religion just because they were paying me good money which I need. I had to answer to family and friends whom I had already told I was going to continue wearing the hijab.’ (Independent, 38)

Independent’s comment shows the boundary between the secular (global) aesthetic professionalism of her organization and the religious taste of her private life. For Independent the value of economic capital of a highly-paid job, along with the symbolic capitals of prestige and status of a job in a global/multinational organization makes her boundary work, between personal religious aesthetic taste and organizational appearance norms, settle in favour of her organization, and thus conform to the organizational aesthetic labour norm. This tradeoff has various advantages in her personal life, which will be discussed in chapter seven.

A requirement for smart clothing and the exclusion of religious clothes exists in local business (not multinational) organizations as well. Free Spirit worked for a public relations and advertising agency at the time of my first phase interview with her; by

the time I went back to her for the second phase after eight months she had left her previous job. She explained:

‘I knew very well that if I started wearing a hijab it would be taken negatively and I might either be asked to take it off or would be moved to a different post and probably would never get promoted from there. So I decided rather than taking that risk I would start my own home-based business. This way I don’t have to explain my decision of pursuing a religious lifestyle to others.’ (Free Spirit, 34)

Interestingly, Free Spirit started her own hijab business selling stylized hijab, which I term as smart hijab as opposed to conservative *burqa*. Free Spirit’s store sells stylized religious attire to both maintain the modesty requirement of religion, yet be suitable for the corporate working women’s professional look. Free Spirit thinks that through such smart hijab, professional women can now maintain their corporate jobs and the inflow of economic and symbolic capital (global professionalism), yet do not have to give up their personal religious practices. Free Spirit’s attempt to stylize religious attires enables her to negotiate aspects of religious dressing within middle-class construction of respectable sari and salwar kameez through adding a headscarf to them, as well as organizational aesthetic norms of stylized dressing. However, whether Free Spirit is correct in assuming that smart hijab will be better accepted in corporate businesses is impossible to evaluate in this research, as Independent’s smart hijab was not accepted by her multinational company employer and none of the other participants working in corporate businesses practise smart hijab.

Some older participants in corporate organizations also partake in context-specific smart dressing, which means that while at professional events they conform to organization aesthetic norms, but when at home or at familial settings they conform to respectability norms of traditional style sari and salwar kameez. Forty-year-old Fighter explains:

‘When I am travelling abroad for work, I drink wine, wear Western clothes and go dancing with my peers from all over the world. At this age if I did all these here in Dhaka I would become a hot topic of gossip in the office.’ (Fighter, 40)

To Fighter drinking wine, wearing Western clothes and going for a dance are Western practices, against religious norms (alcohol consumption) and are considered ‘inappropriate’ and immoral, thus unrespectable; particularly for women who are in their forties, married and have children. However, she works for a company which often sends her to international events meeting other global competitors, many of whom are from Western countries, and with them such behaviour is both acceptable and expected, thus she adapts to such practices. Thus among older new women, context-specific Western dress and practices are acceptable when they are outside the country (as previously 34-year-old Free Spirit said she participates in such practices within Bangladesh). Another participant, 45-year-old Caller who is the CEO of her own research company and an entrepreneur, explains:

‘I often wear clothes for my professional parties that I otherwise avoid in family functions. For instance, I wear sleeveless blouse with a trendy chiffon sari, which my husband and teenage daughters don’t like me wearing on an

everyday basis. Women my age usually avoid such provocative clothes in Dhaka.’ (Caller, 45)

I have discussed the stylization of Bengali attires in terms of wearing chiffon saris and sleeveless or tight-fitting tops in chapter five and how such practices are identified as smart clothing appropriate for professional women. Like Fighter, Caller also adds the factor of age in this equation, whereby one’s family draws a boundary for middle-aged married women to avoid such smart clothing at family occasions. ‘Trendy’ attire such as a chiffon sari and sleeveless blouse is considered ‘provocative’, which is also read as sexualized in the Bengali community, and thus inappropriate, immoral or unrespectable for middle-aged women. But to maintain their global careers and inflow of economic capital through income, participants like Caller take on context-specific smart dressing, illuminating the performative aspect of conforming to aesthetic labour, and also conform to norms of respectability by wearing traditional style Bengali attires for familial occasions, upholding Bengali cultural practices above sexualized aesthetic practices.

The rest of the participants in this sector, Life, Hope and Brave, practice smart dressing both at work and outside. They all partake in both stylized Bengali cultural clothing and occasional Western clothing practices.

The above discussion substantiates Witz et al’s (2003) central claim that embodied workplace performances are both ‘commodified and valorized through aestheticization’ (ibid.:41). But such explicit emphasis on regulation of the body and appearance in various organizations, has particular implications for social variables, such as gender, class and religion, and are linked to the sense of embodied selfhood

(Wolkowitz, 2006:96). Aesthetic labour can cause job discrimination, given the close connection between appearance and ‘legally protected categories’ of race, sex, age and religion (Mears, 2014). Mears gives an example of the retailer Abercrombie, which recently settled a lawsuit brought by a former employee, a woman whose hijab managers said violated the company’s ‘look policy’, and for which she was fired (ibid.:1331). Although my findings demonstrate a similar response by corporate employers to women’s religious practices, I argue that economic capital derived from highly-paid corporate jobs and the global lifestyles associated with these jobs legitimizes the acceptability of smart dressing and Western dressing as an alternative form of respectable aesthetic practice to conventional sari and salwar kameez or religious hijab. Gilbertson (2014) argued that practices of fashion (which often means Western practices) are especially important for young unmarried women in Hyderabad India. Similarly, here younger participants are more accepting of their global professional image in relation to aesthetics, and conform to organizational aesthetic standards of smart dressing. But older participants only *perform* aesthetic labour and conform to respectable aesthetic norms through context-specific smart dressing. Thus appropriate and acceptable dressing for women varies according to age.

Public and Educational Institutes

This category of organizations consists of government offices, policy research institutes and educational institutes, who have the lowest salary structure among the three types of organizations. They are mostly associated with the state or government directly or indirectly and uphold Bengali culture in relation to aesthetic practices of employees. Jobs in this sector are also a traditional source of middle-class women’s profession, as opposed to the other sectors discussed in this chapter which emerged

through the country's neoliberal turn. Six participants work in this category of organizations: Informed (35), Happy (38), Decision Maker (35), Nest (34), Instinct (35) and Integrity, and they conform to organizational aesthetic norms, simultaneously conforming to normative respectable attires of sari and salwar kameez. In this sector participants convert their cultural capital to economic capital through income and symbolic capital of respectable middle-class women (in the normative sense). This category of organizations is also more accepting of religious embodiment practices. However, all the participants in this sector wear Western garb when they are in Western countries, thus practice context-specific smart dressing. Only one actually transgresses organizational aesthetic norm by wearing stylized Bengali cultural attire. Unlike the corporate businesses, public and educational institutes deploy covert means to implement aesthetic labour norms through peer pressure, rather than management control.

In teaching jobs in Bangladesh, for women educators there is an unspoken and implicit culture of wearing sari and salwar kameez only. In addition, these Bengali cultural attires are mostly worn in traditional ways (thus traditionally respectable ways as opposed to smart ways) in terms of the scarf being worn across the body³⁷ with the salwar kameez, long kameez (top) as opposed to short or sleeveless kameeze, elbow length blouse with a cotton sari as opposed to sleeveless blouse and chiffon or any other transparent material of sari etc. Two out of the four participants who work for

³⁷ The scarf of a Salwar kameez is different from a headscarf or the hijab. It is usually a long piece of cloth matching with the Kameez (top) and Salwar (trouser) and comes as a set of three-piece attire. The modern ways of wearing a scarf are on one's side, falling from the shoulder or around the neck. Both these styles keeps one's chest area uncovered. The traditional and conservative way of wearing the scarf is criss-crossed across one's chest, covering the chest entirely.

educational institutes conform to this norm. Informed is a 35-year-old Assistant Professor at the national university. She explains:

‘I usually wear sari or traditional style Shalwar Kameez... When young girls join teaching, they often wear Kameez of the new trend; you know the very short ones? I think it’s quite inappropriate to wear such attires, what if something falls on the floor and she has to pick it up during a class. Young male students will be more interested in her body than her teaching!’
(Informed, 35)

The inappropriateness of the ‘new trend’ is linked to the challenge it poses for traditional understanding of female propriety and respectability. Informed’s comment demonstrates that she finds young girls’ practice of short tops, which she terms as ‘new trend’, inappropriate as it attracts undesired male attention. By associating such ‘new trends’ with age she presents young women as those who risk moral propriety and respectability. Such a perspective is in line with colonial and post-colonial Bengali nationalist ideas of middle-class respectability articulated in relation to maintaining moral superiority of the middle class above working class and Western femininity which were perceived to be at risk of causing sexual chaos through immoral behaviour and embodiment practices, and thus were not respectable.

A similar comment is made by Happy who works as a Lecturer in a private university:

‘Recently I have noticed some young girls just blindly follow new fashion. Many wear this see-through lace material which is a Western import and use it to make Bengali clothes like Salwar kameez. I think it’s quite indecent to

wear such sexualized clothes in universities and our society at large. And that also when we have such nice clothes of our own!’ (Happy, 38)

Happy clearly distinguishes Western clothes as sexual and indecent and Bengali cultural clothes as appropriate and thus respectable. It is not the particular attires per se that are the problem, but how certain styles and materials put women’s bodies on public display (short tops and see-through materials revealing young women’s body parts that must be covered) that causes loss of respectability. Again the legacy of colonial discourses of middle-class respectability is maintained by some participants today, who conform to the boundaries of ‘virtuous’ women who can showcase their career ambition in the public sphere, but must protect their bodies from being on public display. Thus Happy and Informed associate their appearance with de-sexualized, decent and respectful clothing practices and conform to both organizational and normative middle-class respectability norms. However, it is important to note that both Informed and Happy wore Western clothes when they studied abroad, thus they practice context-specific smart dressing and find it appropriate to wear Western clothes when in Western countries, where such aesthetic practice is normative.

Similarly, the two participants who work for a local policy research organization, Decision Maker and Nest, also conform to organizational aesthetic norms of Bengali cultural dressing while in Dhaka, but when they go abroad they wear Western clothes. Decision maker is a Senior Research Associate and says:

‘I think when people hear the term ‘new woman’ they might instantly think of some high profile corporate professional dressed in Western clothes, speaking in English, travelling all over the world, like the character in one of your ads!

But I am a 'new woman' who wants to make her country proud by doing work that involves bringing change in my country's policies. I uphold our Bangladeshi culture and ethics by wearing Bengali clothes! Just because my look is not so modern, doesn't mean I am any less intelligent or smart than others. Looking smart in Western or very expensive clothes, with a fully made up face and socializing with the elite is not all there is to becoming an empowered woman.' (Decision Maker, 35)

To Decision Maker, maintaining a Bengali cultural and nationalist appearance is something that makes her superior to Western or too modern women (read elite) who lack loyalty towards their own culture, and thus are unrespectable. Decision Maker's policy research job explains her familiarity with gender equality issues, represented through her lingo of 'empowered woman'. She tries to establish that it is not one's appearance that makes a woman 'empowered' but her contribution to society and nation which is the true measure of her 'empowered' new woman position. The other participant working in a public organization is Nest who wears smart hijab and does not receive any disapproval from her organization in relation to her religious aesthetic practice. But as noted both Decision Maker and Nest wore Western clothes when they lived abroad for educational purposes. Nest added a headscarf to trousers and shirts and Decision Maker wore jeans and t-shirts, but avoided dresses and skirts. In this research I read such context-specific aesthetic practice as smart dressing and while Decision Maker and Nest (and previously mentioned Happy and Informed) conform to respectability and organizational aesthetic norms in Bangladesh, they negotiate with Bengali middle-class respectable aesthetic norms through experimenting with their aesthetics when outside the country. However, by not disrupting the overall

accountability structure of respectability in Bangladesh, they are essentially conforming to it.

Thirty-five-year-old single participant Instinct works for an educational institute and shows more negotiation power both in relation to the organizational aesthetic labour norm and respectability norm:

‘...when I hang out with friends in Dhaka I often wear fatua and jeans. During my MA and PhD in the UK I wore all types of Western clothes, like dresses, skirts and everything...I just don’t wear them at my workplace.’ (Instinct, 35)

In addition to wearing Western clothes while in Western countries, Instinct also wears hybrid clothes – a mix of Western and Eastern dress – such as *fatua* and jeans within Bangladesh, but not at her workplace. To conform to her teaching organization’s aesthetic norm, Instinct never puts pictures of herself in non-traditional clothes on her social networking profiles as she does not want her students or colleagues to find out about this side of her. This may be due to the fact that she is aware that her fusion or Western aesthetic practices are a transgression of middle-class understanding of female propriety and as a result she may receive condemnation. The policing and disciplining of any transgression of aesthetic labour norm by peers and colleagues is explained by Instinct:

‘I know people talk about lecturers who wear too flashy or stylish clothes. Senior professors, both men and women, usually consider them indecent. In our department there is this group of senior professors, all women, who act as the ‘decency police’ you may say. We had a new girl join the department as a lecturer; she was newly married and liked wearing saris. Soon I noticed some

of the professors in the ‘decency police’ group telling other younger lecturers who did not always wear saris – “you should all learn how to dress from her”.’ (Instinct, 35)

Those who do not follow the Bengali cultural aesthetic labour norms of educational institutes are often labelled negatively. Such disciplining by senior colleagues may be the reason why participants like Instinct prefer to perform aesthetic labour by context-specific clothing and conceal their practices of Western or smart dressing.

Despite such policing by peers, Integrity, who works in the national university, is able to openly transgress her organizational aesthetic norm. She lived in Western countries for over ten years and is also an active feminist:

‘You know I actually love wearing a Sari. But when I joined Dhaka University, I was very young, mostly wore smart salwar kameez and I guess I looked my age. Though there is no written rule, my colleagues started hinting that I should wear a Sari regularly to look like an associate professor! That did it, I just stopped wearing a sari entirely and now sometimes with my Salwar kameez I don’t even wear a scarf. I don’t really like people trying to control what I wear or what I look like... Because of my carefree attitude some think I am *beyadob* (ill-mannered), *mathai chit* (crazy) and unfeminine.’ (Integrity, 38)

Integrity is rejecting the Bengali cultural aesthetic rules of her organization and adapting to smart clothing practices that she is labelling as her personal taste and a form of challenge to her organization’s aesthetic labour norm. Her personal taste may be a result of her experience of living in Western countries for over ten years and her feminist identification, which makes her aware of society’s and organization’s control

over women's bodily practices. As a result she has to endure negative mocking labels from her own peers. Integrity transgresses her organizational aesthetic labour norm and negotiates with respectable aesthetic practices in Bangladesh.

Taylor and Tyler (2000) note in their airline case study that some individuals experiment with and even parody different roles and identities at workplaces. For example, lesbian and gay flight attendants parody heterosexual roles at workplace, but outside the organization their lesbian or gay identity work as a strategy to resist organizational identification and separate their own private sexuality from their public organizational sexual identity (ibid.:90). I construct Instinct's conformation to organizational norms while at work, but transgression of such norms outside, as a 'parody' or performance whereby she rejects her management's manipulation of her aesthetic identity of traditional Bengali attires and upholds new womanhood through smart dressing. Caven et al (2013) found that in recruitment agencies in the UK, comments are often made to regulate female employees' appearance, such as, referring to employees as looking rough, 'fat' or a 'big girl', retaining baby weight after returning from maternity leave etc. But female employees accepted these comments as constructive and only one employee chose to leave her company due to such comments, but still did not challenge it (ibid.:484). In this research, Integrity finds scope to transgress her organization's aesthetic labour norm, and also ignores her identification as ill-mannered, crazy or unfeminine.

Gilbertson (2011:170) argues middle-class (and upper-class) 'cultural capital, then, is not just about being able to afford fashionable clothes, but also about knowing what kinds of clothes are appropriate to each occasion or field'. I identify participants such as Informed, Happy, Decision Maker and Nest's conformation to both organizational

aesthetic norms and the Bengali middle-class respectable aesthetic norm as the cultural capital of smart dressing as they demonstrate their knowledge of identifying what is the suitable and appropriate practice in what context and conform to this accordingly. I argue anonymity of new women in Western countries and the normativity of Western attires in those spaces, enables them to experiment with their dressing and performance of respectability in foreign lands, but in Bangladesh they choose to conform to norms of respectable aesthetic practices. Like the corporate business sector, participants like Happy and Informed mentioned that younger women in Bangladesh are prone to smart dressing. In addition Instinct and Integrity may not be young, but Instinct's single status and both Instinct and Integrity's experience of living in Western countries may influence their personal taste to maintain their global new women image through smart dressing as opposed to Bengali cultural norms of propriety and respectability.

NGOs and Development Organizations

NGOs and development organizations are run by Western donors or state funds, such as local NGO-BRAC and foreign organizations – DFID (UK), World Bank (USA), USAID (USA) etc. Their salary structure is in the middle of public and corporate jobs. Their organizational aesthetic culture emphasizes their clients' preference in aesthetic practices. Seven participants work in this category of organization: Flora (33), Modernity (35), Freedom (35), Flower (39), Singing Bird (38), Butterfly (32) and Complete (32). Participants in this sector respond to signifiers of stakeholder/partner organizations' or clients' lifestyles emulated through dress sense and style, and cultural and religious aspects. The clients in this sector are unique, identified as beneficiaries of developmental or philanthropic projects or state organizations, thus poor communities, natural disaster struck communities or public organization

employees (as discussed in the previous section). Participants in this sector are expected to demonstrate professionalism by responding to clients' sensibilities and a conservative (often working-class or poor) lifestyle through their aesthetics. In so doing most participants conform to organizational aesthetic norms. However, outside their contact with clients and stakeholders all participants have a preference for stylized Bengali attires or Western garb for everyday use and thus they negotiate with normative conceptions of respectable aesthetics and construct smart dressing as an alternative form of respectable aesthetic practice.

Participants who work for national and international NGOs and development organizations say that the job advertisements in this sector or the interview directly address the fact that the employee may have to travel to rural areas for work. Another aspect of employment may be regular contact with public and government offices and ministries. Such requirements of the job signal the social negotiation that may be involved with these positions in terms of aesthetic practices for women. According to Flora, who works at an international donor organization:

‘Field work in villages may put some women off...as often the communities we deliver these projects to are not entirely supportive of us. So at a personal level we also have to try to blend in as much as possible by looking and talking like them, trying to be sympathetic to their condition. Whether an employee will be able to do it gets evaluated through the hiring process.’ (Flora, 33)

NGOs and development organizations expect their employees to have the ability to present themselves in multiple ways depending on who they are encountering in their jobs. I have identified this knowledge of distinguishing practices according to the

various fields new women occupy, as the cultural capital of smart dressing which new women appropriate into economic capital of income through conforming to organizational aesthetic labour norms. This cultural capital of employees in this sector is evaluated directly while hiring, through making it explicit that their work will involve direct relations with people from a variety of backgrounds outside the organization. The associated social and cultural negotiations in terms of appearance and mannerisms are kept covert under the umbrella of the general field work or working with other public organization frameworks. Senior Research Officer of an international development organization, Modernity explained:

‘In my previous position with the Red Cross I was the first woman to visit the Sidr (cyclone) victims near the coast. Some of my colleagues, especially men, were quite shocked by the ease with which I adapted my appearance to work there. I covered my head with a scarf and wore conservative clothes as I know people who live near the coastline are always more religious due to the uncertainties of natural calamities in the region. I also went with one backpack containing just a couple of salwar kameezs and worked there for a week in those same clothes... One of my male colleagues even told me upon my return that until then he thought I was a “Nonir Putul” (wax doll), but my work with the cyclone victims proved my efficiency to him.’ (Modernity, 35)

Modernity’s privileged class upbringing and appearance of stylized smart dressing, which is contrary to conventional style Bengali cultural attires, made her male colleague doubt her professionalism in relation to adapting to a very different environment of a cyclone torn area, where people were poor, conservative and religious. This doubt about Modernity’s efficiency has both gender and class

connotations. Modernity claims that she was the first woman to work in the area, and when Modernity explains how she demonstrated her professionalism through adapting to the environment, she primarily refers to her clothing practices and appearance, rather than the tasks she was able to carry out. Thus although new women are taking up jobs in various new sectors in Bangladesh their professionalism is still measured in relation to their gendered and classes characteristics, such as aesthetics, which define their suitability for these jobs. Modernity's organization is able to extract value from her cultural capital as she is able to practise smart dressing (in addition to carrying out her other job duties). If she only practised her privileged middle-class aesthetic taste then her organization would not be able to get the same value from her. Modernity's personal taste of stylized Bengali cultural attires is a sign of her negotiation with respectability norms, while her conformation to context-specific conservative dressing is a marker of her performance of aesthetic labour.

Singing Bird and Freedom lived abroad in Western countries for some time and often wear Western outfits by choice for their work in international development organizations. Although their own management does not impose any direct regulation over their clothing practices, both participants feel their personal taste of Western aesthetic practice causes them professional disadvantage in various ways in various contexts. Previously Freedom worked for World Bank Bangladesh and often had to work with Bangladeshi government officials of different levels. She explains:

‘At the beginning of my career when I used to go to the ministries and government agencies where the staff are mostly men, they used to think I am a secretary, receptionist or note taker of some World Bank employee who came to represent her boss! Sometimes they would not even acknowledge my

presence, especially the lower level staff like the secretary of a minister to whom I would have to go to make appointments to meet the minister. Then I started wearing saris to these offices to look older and kept asking questions even if they gave me short reluctant answers first, they eventually realized I mean business and I am not going to quieten down after they give a half-hearted answer.’ (Freedom, 35)

Freedom highlights the importance of mixing the boldness of modern women with Bengali cultural attire like a sari and how this combination gives her more authority and respect among the Bangladeshi male government officials she had to interact with. I have discussed previously that public organizations like government offices, maintain traditional Bengali aesthetics as far as female employees’ clothing and appearance is concerned. Freedom’s work involves regular contact with stakeholders, whose aesthetic sense is different from Freedom’s taste for smart dressing. But Freedom is able to use her knowledge of what are the appropriate clothes for which context and to perform aesthetic labour accordingly to maintain her partnership with various organizations. Thus Freedom performs or conforms to aesthetic labour, but her personal taste in aesthetic is contrary to both her organization’s clients’ expectations and middle-class respectability norms.

Singing Bird is 38 years old, mother of two, and a Manager in a British development organization who also runs her own fitness classes for a local health club. She has studied and worked in the USA for about ten years and feels comfortable in Western clothes as office attire. Although she does not get direct comments on her clothes, she expressed that she is well aware that some of her colleagues, both men and women, do not approve of her Western clothing practices. She is also aware of these negative

impressions of her in her office whereby some consider her, ‘vulgar’, ‘inconsiderate’ and ‘too modern’ for Bangladeshi society. She further added that she noticed that on the days she wears trousers and t-shirt to work some of her male colleagues pass by her and do not even exchange greetings. While on other days when she might wear a salwar kameez or a sari these same men greet her and may even give her a compliment. I identify Singing Bird’s experience to be similar to what Instinct previously termed as groups of colleagues who act as ‘decency police’ to control organizational aesthetic standards. In Singing Bird’s case, as her immediate superior and the team she directly works with so far have not directly made any negative comments about her clothing practices, she is able to continue wearing her desired outfits at work. In doing so, Singing Bird transgresses (by showing ambivalence) her colleagues’ and peers’ expectations of wearing Bengali cultural attires, and upholds her personal taste of smart dressing, some days wearing trousers and shirts and on other days wearing salwar kameez or sari.

Flower works for a national NGO as a Director and has to regularly work with government officials, lawyers and judges. Born and raised in the USA, Flower is very much used to wearing Western outfits. But when working with local officials she chooses to wear traditional Bangladeshi outfits like a salwar kameez or a sari as she thinks that these are the clothes her counterparts are used to and she does not want to alienate herself from them by wearing Western clothes. For Flower there are already some aspects about her which may distinguish her from other Bangladeshi women, such as her accent. Thus she does her best to blend in with her clients in government offices or the project beneficiaries of the NGO she works for so they see her as their own.

Other participants in NGOs and development organizations, like Butterfly and Complete, are at the younger strata of participants, both aged 32, and also lived in Western countries for educational purposes. Both have a personal taste for stylized salwar kameez, sari and regular use of Western garb. But when delivering project initiatives they adapt to local aesthetics of the communities they come into contact with, thus wear more conservative or traditional style of salwar kameez or sari and conform to the organizational aesthetic norm.

The primary mode of conforming to the organizational aesthetic norm and negotiation with norms of respectable aesthetic practices among participants in NGOs and development organizations, is through active management of aesthetic practices as both signs of modernity and global dispositions, while also having the knowledge of spaces where propriety, tradition and religiousness is expected and must be maintained. I use Witz et al's (2003) understanding of 'performance' of the aesthetic embodied self to explain this. Borrowing from Goffman, they claim that people put on different performances of the self in different contexts, making a distinction between areas where performance is maintained and where it is 'dropped' (ibid.:39). In the case of NGOs and development organizations, participants' comments have demonstrated that their performance of aesthetic labour is situational and mediated by their social location. When among poor and conservative communities, participants adapt their aesthetic to suit that community by partaking traditional and conservative aesthetic practices in terms of covering the head etc. which they do not do otherwise. While Freedom chooses to wear a sari when interacting with government organization staff, as opposed to her personal taste of Western garb. Alternatively, Singing Bird is able to show ambivalence towards the negative labels that are associated with her due to her personal taste of occasional Western garb, thus like Integrity in the public and

educational sector, Singing Bird transgresses her colleagues' covert attempts to discipline her taste of smart dressing, which may be derived from her long experience of living in a Western country. Singing Bird and all other participants in this sector uphold their global new woman image through smart dressing in everyday life, when not in contact with clients and construct their smart aesthetic practice as an alternative form of respectable attire. Unlike the other sectors, I did not find any specific age discrepancies in aesthetics in this sector of jobs as all participants have a personal taste for smart dressing.

Conclusion

In chapter five, I identified smart dressing as an alternative form of respectable aesthetic practice of new women to conventional style sari and salwar kameez. In this chapter, I have presented a nuanced picture of the ways new women negotiate their with their respectable aesthetic practices in relation to smart dressing in various workplaces, and demonstrated how these negotiations are as much influenced by their organizations, as their class, age and exposure to foreign countries. Transformation of Bangladeshi society through globalization and neoliberalization has brought an increasing number of middle-class women into public life, pursuing careers in different kinds of service sector jobs. Previous studies have highlighted how middle-class women often balance between various classed constructions of clothing practices (Gilbertson, 2011; 2014; Talukdar and Linders, 2013; Thapan, 2004; 2009; Tarlo, 2006; Liechty, 2003). I have added implicit and informal organizational aesthetic labour norms to this complex matrix. My key finding in this chapter is the dynamic nature of smart dressing. Thus smart clothing practices are about dissolving boundaries between various classed, cultural, religious, Western aesthetic practices

and organization's aesthetic labour norms, making it an alternative form of respectable aesthetic practice of new woman. Thapan (2004:416) called this 'managing the destabilizing contradictions' produced by globalization in relation to middle-class respectability in India, whereby new women balance their role as symbol of good (respectable) yet 'modern' woman (participating in paid employment), well versed in a contemporary consumerist and trendy lifestyle. My findings expand the South Asian literature of respectability and new womanhood by adding organizational aesthetic labour norms to the complex negotiation or aesthetic practices of new women. I demonstrated that younger new women construct smart dressing as a symbol of their global professionalism and an alternative form of respectable aesthetic practice in urban Bangladesh, while older new women are more keen on performing smart dressing either in an organizational context or outside Bangladesh, and do not disrupt the normative boundaries of middle-class women's respectable attires of traditional style sari and salwar kameez.

In terms of aesthetic labour, this is the first research that addresses women's conformation, negotiation and transgression of organizational aesthetic labour norms in the service sector of Bangladesh. Although most aesthetic labour literature evaluates how women employees conform to norms of aesthetic labour (Witz et al, 2003; Wong and Wang, 2009; Jeou-Shyan et al, 2011; Lan, 2003; Pettinger, 2011; Hanser, 2008; Williams and Connell 2010; Gruys, 2012; Pettinger, 2004), I contribute to the literature that identifies instances when women resist, misbehave and ignore employers' instructions of aesthetic labour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Caven et al, 2013; Plunkett, 2011; Davies, 2011; Pilkington, 2011). In doing so I highlight that the boundaries of aesthetic norms are more permeable than the existing literature presents them to be, and Bangladeshi new women are able to conform, negotiate and

transgress these norms, establishing their distinction of new womanhood, both in relation to organizational aesthetic labour and middle-class respectability.

I argue that new women's professionalism enacted through smart dressing is a cultural capital from which both the worker and the organization can derive rewards. In all three sectors the majority of the participants conform to organizational aesthetic labour norms. This may be due to the importance of economic and symbolic capitals they gain from their professions which reinstate their class status. Participants accrue economic capital through salaries from their jobs. However, younger participants and those who lived in Western countries for some time (with some exceptions) also gain symbolic capital by identify themselves as progressive global professional new women, through practicing smart dressing and (re)do normative conceptions of middle-class respectability and propriety through negotiation (with conventional sari and salwar kameez only).

Older married participants in the corporate sector and three participants working in public and educational institutes have a personal taste for respectable and conventional sari and salwar kameez. But Fighter and Caller conform to their corporate organizations' smart aesthetic norm through context-specific use of stylized sari or Western garb and accrue economic and symbolic capital. While Happy, Decision Maker, and Informed conform to organizational Bengali cultural attire norms and also accrue economic capital and symbolic value of respectable women (in the normative sense). Thus participants' practice of smart dressing vary widely according to age, experience of living in Western countries and the organizations they work for.

I conclude that new women's negotiations of aesthetic practices are highly complex, nuanced and heterogeneous. I identify new women's choice of smart dressing (both stylization and context specificness) and transgression of organizational aesthetic labour norms as sites where they demonstrate their agency, negotiation and self-definition of new womanhood. Sixteen participants have a personal taste for stylized and westernized Bengali cultural attire or religious hijab while the remaining five participants also partake in context-specific smart dressing.³⁸ I argue that neoliberal workplaces like corporate organizations and non-Bengali Western spaces provide women the freedom to experiment or negotiate with norms of middle-class respectability and propriety, and by extension their new womanhood. Secondly, some participants like Integrity and Singing Bird are able to transgress organizational aesthetic labour norms of traditional style Bengali cultural aesthetic practice, which is the same as norms of middle-class respectability. Despite receiving disciplining remarks from peers, they openly transgress or show ambivalence to such disciplining and surveillance and adhere to their personal taste of smart dressing. All these practices can be read as a sign of new women's ability to negotiate with unfavourable aesthetic demands and an emphasis of individual choice, self-presentation and personal taste in clothing practices. However, they only negotiate with the accountability structure of female propriety by still practising Bengali cultural aesthetics with subtle changes and only wear sari and salwar kameez for occasions that are important to the family, culture and nation such as weddings, official events where they represent the country and religious and cultural festivals. In addition

³⁸ Table 6.1 presented every day or workplace clothing practices of participants and presented 18 participants as practising stylized smart dressing as opposed to 16. This is because the two older participants, Fighter and Caller, despite having a personal taste for traditional Bengali cultural attires, partake stylized smart dressing practices conforming to their corporate organization's aesthetic labour norm.

structural resources such as participants organizations also exert considerable control over their (re)negotiation with respectable aesthetic norms. Thus smart dressing is not an entire abandonment of respectability norms, rather a hybrid and alternative version of it.

In this chapter I have addressed how new women (re)do respectability within the workplace through continuous boundary work between respectable and unrespectable aesthetic practices in response to their organizational aesthetic labour norms. In the next chapter I turn to new women's (re)doing of respectability in the context of family, through boundary work between work-home life balances.

Chapter 7: (Re)doing Respectability in the Family: Achieving to a 50-50 Work-Home Life Balance

Introduction

This chapter shifts focus from workplaces to home and considers how participants (re)do respectable femininity within the family. There are two types of boundary work under consideration here: first, the boundary work between respectable practices and unrespectable practices of women within the family; second, the boundary work between work-home life balances. To avoid confusion, I term the first type of boundary work as (re)doing respectability and the latter as 50-50 work-home life balance. In chapter five, through participants' responses to the advertisements, I indicated that a 50-50 work-home life balance is identified as a defining practice of new womenness by respondents. I read such work-home life balance as an alternative to the normative practice of prioritizing familial duties above career, which symbolizes women's respectability in South Asian countries (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Fernando and Cohen, 2013).

Participants' narratives of 50-50 balance imagine new women as married with children, and able to navigate their domestic and familial responsibilities, saving time which they then invest in their careers. In so doing they risk being coded as unrespectable. However, through conforming and negotiating with some normative roles, such as reinstating class dominance which is coded as symbolic of middle-class respectability, concealing unrespectable practices (night time work-related socializing), substituting their domestic work (rather than abandoning it), and maintaining public display of socializing duties for the family, new women are able to

navigate the risk of being read as unrespectable. I call this 50-50 work-home life balance as (re)doing of respectability as new women strategically substitute their domestic and familial duties so they are not charged with neglecting them and are able to give both family and career equal time and importance, rather than prioritizing one over the other. The primary focus of this chapter is going to be seventeen married participants' (re)doing of respectability,³⁹ but I will also draw from four single participants' practices, in relation to socializing responsibilities, to highlight contrasts in various ways of doing respectability by married and single women. New women's navigations of domestic duties are discussed in three interrelated areas: new types of household settings, changing power relations between mother-in-law (MIL) and daughter in-law (DIL) and negotiation of socializing duties for the family. Thus this chapter seeks to answer a subsection of my second research question, *how do the new women (re)do respectable femininity in the context of the family?*

Normative conceptions of middle-class respectability in India portray stay-at-home mothers as respectable women (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011). In the IT sector, Indian new women often 'choose' their domestic roles above their careers and either leave their jobs after childbirth, reduce their workload or decline promotion opportunities (ibid., 2011:156). In many cases this is a wholehearted decision of women, while on rare occasions women show some ambivalence, and thus are identified as failing to enact respectable femininity in family life (ibid.:154). In Sri Lanka despite women's cultural and economic capitals of high educational and professional achievements, visible changes in women's roles as nurturers and care givers are disapproved of and cause loss of respectability (Fernando and Cohen, 2013). Historically Bengali middle-

³⁹ As majority of the participants themselves defined new women as married and with children in chapter five.

class women's respectability was measured against their domestic roles as well (Kabeer, 1991). But in contemporary Bangladesh, middle-class women are expected to contribute to household income, along with their husbands, and/or bring bridal wealth/dowry or inherited assets that contribute to reinforcing the family's class status, thus investing in the family through economic capitals (Sabur, 2010). Although such shifts enable many women to set career goals and achieve increased mobility in the public realm, their families remain a central and dominant factor in their lives (ibid.:136). In addition, social changes do not affect all middle-class women in the same ways, as some families still expect women to stay at home and maintain the household. Some women conform to such expectations, while others defy them and even claim divorce (Sabur, 2010; Parvez, 2011; Karim, 2012). I add to this nascent literature that identifies instances of negotiating respectability in relation to women's domestic roles.

I start the chapter by providing an outline of the various household patterns of participants, which also explains which family members are accessible to participants to substitute their domestic work. In the next section *negotiation household settings semi-extended households*, I demonstrate various ways in which participants utilize their paid employments and saving from semi-extended households to reinvest capitals in their families and claim respectability through obtaining their family's class dominance. Semi-extended household settings also enable them to conceal unrespectable practices from extended family. In the second section *negotiating power relations with boundary keepers* new women co-opt MILs to substitute their domestic and childcare responsibilities which enables them to give their work commitment as much importance as familial commitments. Literature on MIL and DIL relationships in Bangladesh and South Asia highlight the MIL's power over the DIL (Vera-Sanso,

1999; Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001; Naved and Persson, 2005; Chowdhury, 2010; Rozario and Samuel, 2012; Schuler et al, 2013). However, I demonstrate some alternative perceptions and draw on the concept of ‘border keepers’ (Kreiner et al, 2009) who are defined as ‘individuals who either help or hinder an employee’s attempts at work home balance, such as spouse, children, coworkers and supervisors’ (ibid.:715). Working women use border keepers strategically to maintain work-home balance. This conscious choice of women to use the skills and availability of others to help their work-home life balance is a key form of boundary work, thus in this research I refer to those who help participants’ maintain work-home balance as boundary keepers. In this chapter I only discuss the home boundary keepers such as in-laws, particularly MILs. Finally, in the third section *negotiating investment in familial social capital*, I demonstrate how certain familial socializing roles of women, such as attending and hosting social events, festivals and weddings add social capital to their family and constitute their respectability. But women’s age, stage of life (age of children, professional position, marital status) enable them to further negotiate respectable middle-class women’s socializing duties. I conclude that these familial negotiations are part of new women’s boundary work to introduce alternative practices of respectable femininity which may not transform the normative structures, but provide women the opportunity to navigate through by substituting some respectable practices and concealing unrespectable practices.

Household Settings of Participants

This section summarizes the various household settings of the participants, and location of their extended family (in-laws), thus the boundary keepers. A description of the three types of households is available in Appendix 9. It is important to elaborate

on the lifecycle of the various household settings of participants, as several participants' household settings changed over time.

Four participants, Life (40), Flower (39), Happy (38) and Informed (35) have always lived in nuclear households. For Life, Happy and Informed, this is due to the fact that their in-laws live outside Dhaka. Flower used to live in a nuclear family in the USA before she moved to Dhaka and upon her move she chose to live in a nuclear household, similar to her USA household. Three participants, Freedom (35), Fighter (40) and Caller (45), have moved from extended to nuclear households. Caller and Fighter are in the older strata of participants of this research, aged 45 and 40, thus their household lifecycles are longer. Caller also lived abroad for a year with her husband and children when her husband acquired a Master's degree. She gave the reason of living close to children's schools, as they started growing older, to move to a nuclear household. Fighter had a fall-out with her MIL and moved out of the extended family alone; eventually her husband also joined her. Thirty-five-year old Freedom, who lived abroad for education before marriage (and so did her husband, though in different countries), gave the reason of privacy for moving to a nuclear household.

Four participants, Free Spirit (34), Hope (34), Brave (35) and Butterfly (32), have all moved from an extended to a semi-extended household setting. They are in the younger strata of the participants, aged between 32 and 35. Hope explicitly mentioned disagreements with in-laws as the main reason for moving to a semi-extended household. Others reasoned the need for more space after they had children, privacy and ability to be away from the in-laws' scrutiny. However, in-laws' asset constitution and willingness to break up extended families are also major factors enabling participants to be able to negotiate semi-extended households. Four participants,

Independent (38), Decision Maker (35), Singing Bird (38) and Integrity (38) have always lived in semi-extended households. Three of them, Independent, Singing Bird and Integrity, lived in Western countries for education before returning to Dhaka. Their experience of nuclear households, and their in-laws' asset composition, may have influenced their ability to negotiate a semi-extended household. Integrity and Decision Maker financially contribute to the extended family through covering the salaries of household help, expenses of cars, and giving a certain amount of money for food (all shared with their husbands), while the others do not have any formal arrangement of financial contribution to the extended family.

Only two participants, Flora (33) and Destiny's Child (35), have always lived in an extended family. They are both in the younger strata of the participants, aged 33 and 35 respectively. Destiny's Child depends heavily on her MIL's childcare support, and works for her in-laws' company. As Destiny's Child's father-in-law has passed away, her husband and brother-in-law (who also lives in the extended family) run the extended household expenses. While Flora holds a mid-level managerial position, her husband holds a lower level position in his career and earns less than Flora, thus it may be financially difficult for Flora to maintain a nuclear family and it is unknown if Flora's in-laws' are asset rich enough to provide Flora and her husband a separate house. It is important to note that none of the participants moved from nuclear or extended households to semi-extended households, or semi-extended households to extended households. In addition, all single participants live with their parents in an extended household setting when in Dhaka.

No.	Name	Age	Past Household	Present household	Boundary Keepers
1	Life	40	Nuclear	Nuclear	In-laws live out of Dhaka
2	Flower	39	Nuclear	Nuclear	In-laws live in separate household
3	Happy	38	Nuclear	Nuclear	In-laws live out of Dhaka
4	Informed	35	Nuclear	Nuclear	In-laws live out of Dhaka
5	Freedom	35	Extended	Nuclear	In-laws live in completely separate household
6	Caller	45	Extended	Nuclear	In-laws live in separate household
7	Fighter	40	Extended	Nuclear	In-laws live in separate household
8	Free Spirit	34	Extended	Semi-extended	In-laws live next door
9	Hope	34	Extended	Semi-extended	In-laws live next door
10	Brave	35	Extended	Semi-extended	In-laws live next door
11	Butterfly	32	Extended	Semi-extended	In-laws live next door
12	Decision Maker	35	Semi-extended	Semi-extended	In-laws live next door
13	Independent	38	Semi-extended	Semi-extended	In-laws live next door
14	Integrity	38	Semi-extended	Semi-extended	In-laws live next door
15	Singing Bird	38	Semi-extended	Semi-extended	In-laws live next door
16	Flora	33	Extended	Extended	Lives with in-laws
17	Destiny's Child	35	Extended	Extended	Lives with in-laws

Table 7.1: Overview of household lifecycle of married participants

(Re)doing Respectability in the Family: Semi-extended Households, Boundary Keepers and Socializing

New women articulate their views of negotiating 50-50 work-home life balance in two steps: they accrue, convert and invest capitals in themselves and their families and contribute to constructing their class distinction, and this in turn enables them to claim negotiation power to reconstruct their 50-50 work-home life balance as a respectable practice of new women.

Negotiating Household Settings: Semi-extended Households

The eight married participants who live in semi-extended households, Independent (38), Free Spirit (34), Hope (34), Decision Maker (35), Brave (35), Singing Bird (38), Butterfly (32) and Integrity (38), utilize the resources that flow from living in extended/joint family households, such as rent-free accommodation, expenses on food etc. yet also enjoy some of the independence of living in a nuclear family, such as privacy from extended family, avoidance of scrutiny etc. Such household settings enable new women to play a symbolic role in the in-laws' family contributing to their class distinction (by buying symbols of class status), share domestic resources and work, and conceal certain practices deemed unrespectable, such as night time socializing for work. All participants' houses are owned by their extended families. Participants living in semi-extended households are in the younger and middle strata of age groups, aged between 32 and 38, are engaged in relatively low paid jobs or have faced some financial difficulty. For example, five of them are aged between 32 and 35, the youngest strata of the participants. Only three are older; of them Independent's husband was recently bankrupt in his business, while Singing Bird and Integrity work in the public or development sector, which has a relatively lower pay scale than the corporate sector. As some older participants in this research have moved from extended to nuclear households later in their lives, semi-extended households may be a stepping stone for these eight participants before they are able to establish nuclear families. At the time of the interviews all of them relied on their extended family for childcare and food (their extended family bought food items and prepared their meals for them) saving the significant cost of rent, childcare and food, which they reinvested in the family. While some of them ate in their in-laws' houses, others like Free Spirit, Brave and Hope sometimes have food sent to their flats for convenience.

Semi-extended households enable participants to maintain and convert economic capitals to attain a certain lifestyle which signifies their class status. Particularly for younger participants their savings on rent, childcare and food expenses allow them financial flexibility to be able to afford certain consumer choices or future investments, which would be difficult if they lived as nuclear families. Hope explains:

‘The thing is I eat with my in-laws and live in one of my father-in-law’s apartments right below them in the building. So our household expenses are only my household help’s expenses and my daughter’s expenses. My husband is a saving man; I have learned to save from him. As we do not have to pay rent we both save considerably to be able to invest in something big, such as a car or land. I also give money to my parents regularly.’ (Hope, 34)

Hope recognizes that due to her husband and her savings on rent and food, they are able to make long-term economic investments. Seven of the participants in semi-extended household settings talked about long-term investments, thus accumulation of economic capitals. Free Spirit, Independent, Integrity, Decision Maker and Singing Bird talked about investments in property, while Brave and Butterfly talked about investing in a car. I read participants ability to invest in the family as a means of capital accrual and conversion which is a symbolic form of respectability, helping their families maintain their class privilege. However, such capital accruals and conversions are facilitated by their savings from semi-extended household settings.

Setting up semi-extended households is not a prerogative of the participants only. Extended households provide both the patriarch (father-in-law) and matriarch (mother-in-law) considerable power over younger members of family. Younger

members benefit from maintaining a classed lifestyle which may be difficult to maintain at early stages of their career in a nuclear family, and younger women benefit from the support system of such households through learning household management skills, childcare and so on. Thus the complete breakdown of the extended family setting is a loss of status, power and respectability for the older generation as well as a loss of access to a privileged lifestyle and familial support systems for the younger generation. Due to the neoliberal turn of the country and women's increased participation in paid work, both generations look for an option to get the best of both worlds. The older generation may prefer to help the younger generation through providing a support system, both economically and in household chores and childcare, through semi-extended households. And younger families like Hope can negotiate a 50-50 work-home life balance by utilizing the extended family's support system and enjoying the economic stability of a middle-class lifestyle. The younger family's further investment in the family to increase class distinction is a symbol of their respectable position in the family, and may be a reason for the older generation's acceptance of such changing household setting.

Hope also highlights that she is able to give money to her own parents. Such support to natal family appears easier for participants in semi-extended households. Five of the eight participants living in such household settings support their natal families through substantial spending. They are: Hope who financially contributes to her natal family; Brave, who economically contributes to her natal family and her younger brother also lives with her; Integrity, who occasionally buys her parents household items such as a television, furniture and takes them on holiday; Butterfly, who pays for her younger brother's educational expenses; and Decision Maker, who supports her retired widower father economically by arranging care giving services, household

help etc. Of the five participants who live in nuclear families, none of them have any regular arrangement to contribute financially to their natal families, but all buy occasional gifts of consumer goods such as televisions, mobile phones, laptops, iPads, clothes, jewellery etc. Thus participants in semi-extended households significantly contribute to their natal and marital family's class distinction, which I read as a symbol of respectability of new women in contemporary urban Bangladesh.

Semi-extended households appear to provide young married participants increased opportunity to spend on children's concerted development, which is an investment in developing children's cultural capital as well as a sign of class status. Free Spirit explains:

‘...now that we have children, we need to spend on our sons to give them a good education in an English medium school, take them to different classes for extracurricular activities etc. For all this we bought a car, although before we could just use my in-laws’ car.’ (Free Spirit, 34)

A semi-extended household setting gives Free Spirit the economic flexibility and autonomy to reproduce class privilege through concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2011), whereby middle-class parents cultivate talents in their children in a concerted fashion by organizing children's leisure activities, and stimulating children's cognitive and social development. Free Spirit's ability to afford the cultural capital of English medium schooling (which is considerably more expensive than Bengali medium schooling) and investment in her sons' concerted cultivation through extracurricular activities, signify and reproduce her middle-class privilege, thus her family's social status, and that of the next generation. Only two participants' children attend low fee

schools and they both live in nuclear families. Life's children attend a less expensive Bengali medium school as her husband works in the navy and lives outside Dhaka, while Life lives in Dhaka with her children; maintaining two households make it difficult for Life to afford expensive schooling for her children. And Flower's daughter attends an Islamic school as it is near her home. Flower's professional commitments prevent her from travelling far from her house to send her daughter to a reputed school, and she also does not have access to any other family member who can substitute this work for her.

Some participants living in semi-extended households are also able to conceal practices that are considered unrespectable and escape the scrutiny of their in-laws in terms of moral boundaries of respectability, such as staying out at night/after office hours for work events. Free Spirit explains:

‘Before when I used to live with my in-laws the nature of my job required me to attend work dinners without spouse. During busy times I often had to stay at work till midnight and sometimes after a successful project I just wanted to celebrate with my team and go out. This used to bother my in-laws... I would always have to call my mother-in-law personally to tell her that I was going to have dinner out and often had to tolerate angry glares and frowns when I returned home late.’ (Free Spirit, 34)

Thus in extended families participants have to maintain certain normative conceptions of moral respectability which is measured in terms of not being outside alone after regular working hours. Previously Free Spirit was expected to account for herself to her MIL if she was going to be out late, and endure the ‘discipline’ of disapproval for

transgressing moral boundaries of respectability. As I mentioned before, participants with younger children often get their meals sent to their house, from their in-laws' house. Free Spirit is one of them and thus on days that she has to stay out late she chooses to get her food sent to her home, avoiding any explanation for being out late. Brave adds that women working in the corporate sector are always perceived as losing respectability through night time work events, and thus semi-extended households are the most suitable setting for corporate professionals to avoid families' disapproval of such professional practices.

‘When I was single I had no restrictions on attending work parties or hanging out with friends till late at night. But after my marriage even though my husband and I were going to the same work events, these were not very well accepted by my mother-in-law....since we moved next door to her I am now able to go back to my old lifestyle.’ (Brave, 35)

It appears that participants in such households are able to (re)do moral norms of respectable femininity (not applicable to men, as Brave's husband did not receive any disapproval) through partaking in night time socializing for work, as they move out of sight of their in-laws. Participants see socializing, both professional and social, as part of their class culture, a lifestyle, and through semi-extended family settings are able to avoid the disapproving ‘discipline’ of their kin in this regard.

Through semi-extended households both new women and their families get the best of both worlds. The older generation does not lose face in the community for the complete breakdown of the extended household and control over DIL, while participants are able to maximize their capital accrual opportunities which they

reinvest in the family to substitute domestic work (further discussed in the next section), and avoid ‘disciplining’ by in-laws. Being seen alone at night, without their husband, is considered especially unacceptable for married women in South Asia (Fernando and Cohen, 2013). But Sabur (2010) argues that eating out, hanging out with friends in cafes and attending Western style parties (which include alcohol consumption and dancing) are considered part of the lifestyle of younger generations of the affluent middle class in Bangladesh. For the previous generation ‘eating out’ was an occasional affair, and only involved family members. Thus to participants’ in-laws, such night time socializing without the rest of the family is an alien concept, and corporate parties an immoral space for women. Hence there seems to be generational change in conceptualization of middle-class lifestyle and women’s respectability which is being reconciled through semi-extended households.

Negotiating Power Relations with Boundary Keepers

Some married participants in semi-extended and extended households are able to convert kin relations within their in-laws’ family, making allies who then help them maintain a respectable 50-50 work-home life balance, by substituting new women’s childcare responsibilities. These participants are able to transform their kin to assume the role of constructive boundary keepers who help participants’ work-home life balance. Such a process can also change the power hierarchy between the MIL and DIL. Participants with younger children are particularly keen on securing allegiance with their MIL, so they can pursue their careers after marriage and motherhood. These participants are: Free Spirit (34), Independent (38), Hope (34), Destiny’s Child (35) and Butterfly (32). Other participants who have older children rely slightly less on boundary keepers, they are Decision Maker (35) and Singing Bird (38).

As discussed in the previous section, through playing a symbolic role in relation to reproducing class privilege, new women build a protective shield enabling them to attain the opportunity to substitute their gendered domestic work, such as food preparation, childcare etc. and avoid the disciplining of their families. Free Spirit explains:

‘When I was in my first job with Plan UK, where I had regular field work in the villages, I could not give enough time to household work as my homemaker sister-in-law, and that worried me. So to please my in-laws, especially my MIL, I used to try to cook even after returning from field work, completely exhausted! I am a very bad cook! I used to call my mother to ask what I should put next in a dish... I kept thinking God knows what my MIL is thinking of me, that this girl does not know anything about a household!....Now (after moving to semi-extended household) I only help out in cooking during social gatherings.’ (Free Spirit, 34)

Free Spirit’s comment illuminates two things, first, that the normative conception of middle-class respectability requires DIL to participate in household chores; second, that new women are often unable to meet such requirement to the same extent as homemakers, and thus look for room to negotiate through substituting for this work. But this negotiation is only acceptable as long as they maintain a public display of their domestic chores, like cooking during social gatherings. I have previously mentioned that most participants in such household settings eat with their in-laws or get food sent to them, which is acceptable, as these negotiations of domestic work remain unexposed to wider society. I construct such shared arrangements and public displays of household chores in relation to food preparation as a (re)doing of normative

conceptions of respectability through negotiation and conformation respectively, which also has a performative aspect to it. And boundary keepers like MILs are more accepting of such negotiations and public performance of partaking domestic work, as they can still maintain a public display of control over DIL's time and unpaid labour within the home.

Notably, none of the participants living in semi-extended and extended households participate in everyday domestic duties such as food preparation and share their childcare responsibilities with their MILs and household help. MILs also depend on household help for everyday chores. Some participants who have children and live in semi-extended households like Independent, Free Spirit, Hope, Decision Maker and Singing Bird, have their own household help who are primarily responsible for helping with childcare and cleaning, but may also contribute to food preparation.

Independent provides a good example of securing allegiance of boundary keepers such as MIL:

'I had both my children while I was studying. I started working right after graduation and depended on my MIL to take care of the children. After my husband was bankrupt in his business I switched to this job which is much more demanding in terms of hours and foreign travel than my previous job. I still depend on my mother-in-law who lives next door to us for everyday childcare. When I go on foreign travel, I sometimes leave my children with my parents, to give my mother-in-law a break.' (Independent, 38)

Independent acknowledges her dependence on her MIL for childcare, and gives her MIL breaks when she goes away to foreign countries. This shows a reversal of control

over women's time and unpaid labour, whereby contrary to the normative command of MIL over DIL's time and labour, in Independent's case the DIL is also able to obtain control over the MIL's unpaid labour. I identify this role reversal of MIL and DIL as an example of Independent's boundary work, simultaneously negotiating norms of respectability by co-opting her MIL to take care of children for her as well as changing generational power relations. The role reversal can be further observed in participants' comments about how, although they cannot possibly pay their MIL for childcare, they try to compensate for it in various other ways, investing in MIL's social status. Free Spirit explained:

‘In the morning I bathe my sons, feed them and prepare their whole day's schedule and leave my in-laws in charge. I recognize what a big favour my in-laws are doing for me. I often give them expensive gifts, or take them on holidays to show our gratitude.’ (Free Spirit, 34)

Free Spirit herself takes on a considerable amount of labour to access the support of the boundary keepers. When I interviewed Free Spirit her sons were unwell, thus she shared how she got up at 6 am in the morning to prepare food for them, boxed their medication organized according to meal times and then dropped them at her in-laws' flat. Thus participants are also efficient managers of household labour, though they also depend on boundary keepers for support. In addition, Free Spirit compensates for the shared childcare of her MIL through expensive gifts and holidays. I identify participants' purchase of expensive gifts and holidays for their MIL as a classed strategy, which simultaneously obliges their kin to return the favour through childcare, and also maintains the boundary keeper's class status (through the cultural capital of a holiday). In turn such gifts for and expenditure on the in-laws enables participants to

save money on professional childcare (day care is limited in Dhaka and highly expensive), and more importantly gain the loyalty of the MIL. Loyalty of the MIL reduces new women's childcare responsibilities, and disciplining of their avoidance of domestic work enabling them to give their career as much importance as family.

This is further observable in Hope's case. Hope's MIL (and father-in-law) disapproved of Hope going back to work after childbirth, a normative practice of middle-class respectable femininity. Hope's dispute with her in-laws resulted in Hope moving to a semi-extended household. Although at the beginning, Hope's MIL did not want to provide any childcare support to Hope, eventually she did take up the responsibility. Hope explains:

‘... I guess my MIL noticed how my husband is supportive of my career, and due to my income we are now doing so much better economically as opposed to my brother-in-law and sister-in-law. My sister-in-law had to give up her wish to pursue a career as her husband and my parents-in-law did not want her to work after having children...now my MIL is OK to have my daughter stay with her.’ (Hope, 34)

Hope's in-laws wanted Hope to adhere to normative understanding of middle-class respectability, whereby women prioritize their family above careers. As Hope tried to transgress such norms, she received strong disapproval from boundary keepers, and had to temporarily move to her own parents' house, and then to a semi-extended household setting. Finally, she was also further penalized for her transgression by her MIL refusing to help Hope with childcare. Hope sent her daughter to a daycare centre for about a year. But finally through economic capital gained from dual partner income

and improvement of Hope's social status as opposed to her brother and sister-in-law, her MIL's opposition to Hope's career changed to support. Boundary keepers can both help or hinder work-home life balance and thus sanction or punish new women who transgress normative conceptions of respectability achieved through prioritizing the home. New women reinforce their class status through accruing capitals, which can also enable them to reverse intra-household power relations between MIL and DIL. This allows them to secure support from boundary keepers to maintain 50-50 work-home balance through substituting some domestic tasks and publicly performing others and ultimately constructing new women's professions as respectable.

At the time of the interviews, Butterfly was pregnant and by the second phase of interviews she was on maternity leave. Although she mentioned that she planned to depend on her kin for childcare, I cannot expand on her use of boundary keepers, due to lack of information. Singing Bird and Decision Maker have fairly older children and their MIL's involvement in childcare is minimal and supervisory. Decision Maker claimed that her hired help plays a greater role than her MIL. Thus Decision Maker did not mention any explicit capital investment in the MIL. On the other hand Singing Bird recognized her MIL's support saying:

'My own mother and my mother-in-law used to work before they had children, but gave up their jobs after childbirth. I know it might seem selfish of me to depend on them for childcare, while I am pursuing my career... I am extremely grateful for their support.' (Singing Bird, 38)

Singing Bird depends on both her own mother and MIL as boundary keepers for childcare.⁴⁰ Her comment recognizes that a previous generation of women had to give up their jobs after childbirth to maintain respectability and they also did not have access to boundary keepers such as MILs. Singing Bird's gratitude, her comparison of herself to her mother and MIL and awareness that she might appear selfish, establish that the (re)doing of respectability is a site of struggle rather than a straightforward negotiation for new women.

Participants further justify securing MIL's support and changing power structure of MIL and DIL through acknowledging the capitals their families acquire from participants' career or income. Destiny's Child gives an example of how her professional success in her husband's company also contributes to her husband and in-laws' business success. She simultaneously recognizes her contribution to her in-laws' social status as well as her MIL's compromise in order to provide Destiny's Child (and her sister-in-law) with childcare support.

'I know my mother-in-law made a huge compromise for me and my sister-in-law by leaving her 30 year career to look after our children...you see I work for my husband's company. It was established by my father-in-law, after he passed away my husband and brother in-law have taken over and as the eldest daughter-in-law I joined the company right after our marriage. At the end of the day my professional success contributed to my in-laws' business, so they

⁴⁰ Although most participants only discussed their MILs as boundary keepers, this may be due to the fact that MILs are traditionally seen as those who oppose DILs career and for many participants their MILs proximity to their home make it easier for them to depend on them for childcare. However, it is a common custom in Bangladesh for a woman to live with her own parents for some time after childbirth when she learns motherhood skills from her own mother. Participants of this research also did the same, and afterwards often also obtained their own mother's help in childcare, but did not discuss that at length.

appreciate my involvement in this business. I also never get any pressure from my MIL to quit my job although as the director of public relations my workings hours require me to stay out till late a couple of days a week....it's a give and take relationship for me.' (Destiny's Child, 35)

The fact that Destiny's Child considers her relationship with her in-laws as a 'give and take' is an example of the acceptability of mutual benefit from new women's profession, for both the new woman and the boundary keeper. While Destiny's Child's paid labour in her husband's firm adds economic value to the company, her MIL's unpaid labour at home facilitates capital investment by Destiny's Child in her family. Through contribution to the family business, some new women are able to negotiate or (re)do norms of respectability in relation to motherhood duties and night time work. This mutual benefit of MIL and DIL from such professional arrangements of the DIL convert the MIL into a supportive boundary keeper of new women's 50-50 work-home balance.

The dominant literature on the MIL-DIL relationship argues that in South Asia MILs have power over DILs. But De Neve (2011) argued that for a long time kin relations such as MIL facilitate middle-class women's access to employment through childcare in countries like India. He further argues that urbanization enhances such use of wider family networks for young working women (ibid.:91). My findings support this practice and expands Schuler et al's (2013) and Sabur's (2010) finding that women's active participation in paid employment is shifting the power relation between women and their kin, in this case MIL. But participants also compensate for their MILs' support towards their career through providing childcare and substituting domestic work with gifts and by taking them on holidays. Sabur (2010) has argued that tourism

and gift giving and receiving is an important form of social exchange and is meticulously maintained by the Bangladeshi affluent middle class. Privileged class consumption patterns through foreign travel and gifts represent their taste for indulging in luxury goods and global travel. These values and taste not only shape affluent middle-class lifestyles but are explicitly displayed, distinguishing them from other classes (ibid.:104). Thus participants' appreciation of boundary keepers' services through gifts adds value to their MILs' class status, and enables new women to maintain symbolic respectability of adding value to their families.

Negotiating Investment in Familial Social Capital

Another way for new women to (re)do respectability is through conforming and negotiating familial socializing duties such as attending and hosting social events. Negotiating such duties helps older participants achieve a 50-50 work-home life balance by avoiding certain familial socializing responsibilities which gives them more time to devote to their careers. Social networks including kin and friendships are crucial to maintain the class privilege and distinction of the middle-class lifestyle. Participants' comments illustrate that new women are expected to invest money and effort to sustain social networks and relationships for their families, and fulfilling such socializing duties is considered part of their domestic duties. All participants commonly mentioned the requirement of being present at familial social events, such as festivals, weddings and family parties. Some of them conform to this socializing responsibility somewhat positively, while others negotiate and manage such responsibilities more strategically, if they clash with work-related responsibilities.

Informed explains that even though her in-laws do not live in Dhaka city, where she lives and works, she makes sure she travels to her in-laws' house in a different city, to attend all family functions while her husband is in the UK pursuing his PhD:

‘Since they live in Chittagong (a district town of Bangladesh) every time there is a family function or get together I travel for half a day to go and attend it. But it’s my responsibility. Now that my husband is not here, I don’t want them to think that I do not care for these things anymore. I am part of their family and so I must behave like a family member who is ready to help or travel to be with the rest of the family.’ (Informed, 35)

Informed conforms to her familial duty in relation to participating in socializing activities for her in-laws. Similarly, Brave feels responsible for family gatherings though for a somewhat different reason. Brave’s MIL is unwell and her father-in-law passed away a while ago while the eldest son, her husband, has taken care of his sick mother and his younger brother for some time now. Brave feels as the eldest DIL it’s her responsibility to arrange and attend all family gatherings and events, representing her in-law’s family.

‘If I don’t do it, there’s no one else to take care of these things in the family. Hopefully when my brother-in-law gets married I can share this duty with my sister-in-law. But for now I have to take care of this. Although my MIL is in no state to appreciate this, I know if she could she would. And I know my husband appreciates this gesture of mine a lot. That is enough driving force for me.’ (Brave, 35)

Both Brave's and Informed's comments establish that the normative conception of respectability in Bangladesh expects DILs to play an important role in social events, which is part of their familial role. Informed and Brave conform to such notions of respectability and maintenance of their family's social capital. They also identify socializing as a 'duty' and 'responsibility', which means not performing these practices may result in some kind of penalty for transgressing normative standards of middle-class DILs' roles. However, Brave and Informed are both 35 years old, married for less than five years, and still do not have children. Thus their families may be able to exercise more control over their time as they have no childcare responsibilities. Other participants, such as older participants with children and single participants, illuminate a discrepancy in conforming to such norms of socializing and are able to give more time to their career.

Thirty-nine-year-old Flower holds a directorial position in a local NGO, has a young daughter and lives in a nuclear family where she has to take care of her daughter herself rather than relying on extended family. Flower's multiple duties, along with her prestigious professional position, provide her the respectability and negotiation power to ignore comments of extended family about her inability to maintain her socializing role. She says:

'I often arrive late for family parties due to work or miss out others. My MIL does not complain and when I am late she always comes to me and asks if I have eaten or should she take my daughter from me so I can relax and socialize. But many times other family members say things like – why do you need to work, it must be harming your daughter and you do not have time for the rest of your family either – I just smile and let things like this pass without getting

distressed. I know they do this to make me feel guilty about working, by ignoring such comments I refuse to give in to their tactic.’ (Flower, 39)

Flower’s extended family members construct women’s work as a practice that harms their children and restricts them from giving time to their extended family, thus outside the boundary of respectable femininity. But Flower’s ambiguity towards such accusations is a form of negotiation of these normative conceptions of respectability in relation to performing socializing duties for the family, rather than transgression. Although Flower arrives late to parties, she does not avoid them altogether. Thus she is well aware of her responsibilities of socializing for her in-laws’ family, and tries to participate in socializing, despite rebukes.

Fighter is forty, a manager of a manufacturing company and shares a similar experience of extended family disapproval:

‘Every time I miss a family function my husband’s family tries to give me a guilt trip! Some of them even call me the next day to say it was rude of me to give an excuse of work and not attend the function as the only DIL of the family. I have just learned to live with such accusations now.’ (Fighter, 40)

Like Flower, Fighter’s statement illuminates that participants are not passive receptors of family expectations in relation to their socializing responsibilities; rather they actively interpret which aspects of these expectations to conform to and which to negotiate, thus do boundary work. They are also aware that, depending on their conformation and transgression, they will be rewarded or penalized through public criticism. Unlike younger participants like Informed and Brave, Flower and Fighter hold higher positions in their careers and possibly also earn considerably more, which

adds value to their status in the family. Their professional position and accrued capitals provide them the scope to be ambivalent towards disciplining of their negotiation with prioritizing familial duties – in this case, socializing with and for the family – above their careers.

It is unclear in Fighter's comment whether her husband attends these family functions, which she was unable to attend due to work commitments. However, thirty-two-year-old Butterfly's comment demonstrates that rather than the son, it is the DIL's responsibility to attend such family functions:

‘My MIL always made it a point that I have to attend all weddings, birthdays, anniversaries or any other get together in my in-laws’ family. I also have to dress appropriately for these occasions...At the beginning of my marriage my MIL used to tell me which gold jewellery or which sari to wear. My husband rarely goes to these occasions, he has always been an introvert and never really enjoys going to big gatherings unless he knows the people very well. His family never forces him to attend these. But I was never given that option.’
(Butterfly, 32)

Sons are not necessarily required to attend social events or act as bearers of capitals. Butterfly's body is a display of capitals for her in-laws' family, a consolidator of class and a primary site of forming distinction. This may be why the DIL's presence in social events is seen as more important than the son's as femininity represented through embodiment practices of jewellery and clothing in social events represent the family's class status. The importance of displaying classed taste through capitals is

also shared by other, relatively younger participants, such as thirty three year old Flora who says:

‘During festivals and weddings I do the shopping for clothes. My extended family always appreciates my choice of clothes at social events, so they prefer me to do the shopping for them.’ (Flora, 33)

Flora refers to the process of legitimizing classed taste through the cultural capital of clothes at social events. New women’s respectability is not only constructed in relation to attending social events, but also displaying class privilege through cultural capitals and taste during social events. Flora’s taste in clothes is considered a good fit for her family’s classed lifestyle and thus she is vested with the responsibility of maintaining class status through purchasing of clothes for festivals and weddings.

I observe a discrepancy in the socializing norms for women among the four single participants. It appears that the single participants, aged between 32 and 35, purposely avoid familial social gatherings. Interestingly, although their extended families may be disappointed by their lack of social commitment, their natal families do not pressurize them in this regard; this may be because singlehood after a certain age is no longer considered respectable, thus there is no symbolic value to accrue through their presence in social events. Nest is divorced and was pursuing her Master’s degree in the UK at the time of the first phase of interviews:

‘I was lucky to get this opportunity to start my Master’s degree right after my divorce in a foreign country. Otherwise in every social gathering I would have to either explain the reason for my divorce or people would continuously keep telling me about potential grooms. I am able to avoid all that by living abroad

for two years, and hopefully by the time I return people will give up on matchmaking... I always thought my parents would be anxious about me living abroad alone due to what I have gone through in life, but even they were happy that I would be living away from family and friends for a while.' (Nest, 34)

New women's life experiences can equip them with some negotiation power to do the boundary work between what is respectable practice and what is not. Thus living abroad for educational purposes is an acceptable cause for transgressing such norms of socializing. In addition, unlike the DILs who can display capitals for the in-laws, women's single status may automatically cause them loss of social status, particularly in their 30s. All the single participants, Complete, Modernity and Instinct, shared the same possibility of opting out of socializing with family. Modernity gives an example:

'I have an aunt who is determined to get me married! So I avoid social gatherings where she might be present. And my parents never force me to tag along to those occasions now that they know my reason for it...I love hanging out with my friends and close cousins and relatives who just let me be. My family understands this.' (Modernity, 35)

Boundaries of respectability in relation to a daughter's socializing duties are more flexible than for DILs. Single participants like Modernity prefer socializing with the younger generation rather than the older generation, the former being flexible about understanding women's respectability in relation to appropriate age of marriage. This issue of timely marriage and its relation to respectability will be further explored in the next chapter.

Sabur (2010) argues that men and women play different roles in maintaining social relations in Bangladesh. While men are in charge of entertaining friends and networks outside the home, women are in charge of maintaining both kin relations and friendships at the familial level (ibid.:208). Such practices construct middle-class married women's respectable roles within the marriage as crucial in terms of maintaining kin relations and friendships, thus social capital. But such socializing norms make demands on women's time, which in turn makes it difficult for them to achieve a 50-50 work-home life balance. Younger participants seem to conform to this requirement and retain the public performance of respectable femininity through socializing for the family. They also conform to displaying cultural and economic capital through clothing and jewellery at social events. But older and single participants show ambivalence or just reject familial socializing duties. In this research I contend these practices as negotiation of middle-class women's respectability measured in relation to women prioritizing familial duties above work. It is also worth noting that new women often participate in entertaining friends and colleagues outside familial surrounding. I discussed this in the first section of this chapter, *negotiation household settings: semi-extended households*, where Free Spirit and Brave mentioned that they like to celebrate successful projects with colleagues and hang out with friends, which is identified as men's role in socializing among the middle-class (Sabur, 2010). Thus I argue that new women are able to (re)do respectability through negotiating socializing responsibilities, assuming some socializing roles that have been normatively associated with men.

Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to explore how a 50-50 work-home life balance is constructed as a respectable practice of new women, within the context of family. This is an alternative form of middle-class respectable femininity to the normative pattern of prioritizing family above work commonly identified in the South Asian literature (Radhakrishnan, 2009; 2011; Fernando and Cohen, 2013; Sabur, 2010). It also symbolizes new women's gendered progress in the neoliberal global economy of Bangladesh through increased participation in paid employment. I have demonstrated that new women are able to negotiate for new types of household settings, substitute some of their domestic roles through converting their kin into boundary keepers and avoid disciplining by their kin for transgressing norms against night time socializing and negotiating familial socializing duties. But I argue at the end of the day, new women do not change the overall accountability structure of respectability in relation to carrying out familial duties, despite having a job. Domestic work in urban Bangladesh remains feminized and new women put up a public performance of the familial duties so they are not charged for transgressing their respectability measured in relation to prioritizing familial roles above work. Despite their myriad strategies new women still face disciplining from MILs and extended family, when they fail to maintain such public performance, especially in socializing for the family.

Using Bourdieu's (2008) concepts of capitals and feminist understanding of women's capital accumulating strategies (Skeggs, 1997; Lovell, 2000), I have demonstrated that conformation and negotiation of normative conceptions of respectability is mediated by new women's capital accumulation and legitimization strategies. New women participants maintain their class privilege through investing capitals and legitimizing

class taste for their conjugal family in relation to cars and land, and cultural capital of children's English medium schools and concerted cultivation. They also contribute to their natal family either through regular economic contribution or occasional gifts that denote middle-class consumer culture, while some also contribute cultural capital such as siblings' education.⁴¹ Finally, participants contribute to their in-laws' families in relation to paying for household help, gifts and holidays for the in-laws etc. Consumption and investment in long-term consumer goods and assets play a major role in self-definition and public representation and everyday practices of neoliberal middle-classness in South Asia (Donner and De Neve, 2011:9). In Bangladesh the family is the primary site for capital accumulation and maintenance, as individuals partake in accumulating and preserving capitals for further investments to attain opportunities of upward class mobility (Sabur, 2010:173). I identify new women's capital investment in the family as a significant resource which enables them to play a symbolic role in their family's class dominance, to obtain respectability and in turn substitute for their domestic roles, giving them more time to focus on their careers.

Utilizing the investment of capitals in their families, some new women negotiate domestic roles by co-opting MILs or household help, while others partake in night time socializing (which is considered unrespectable) without the knowledge of older generation family members. In relation to socializing duties, younger married women in the early stages of their career conform to such social capital maintenance responsibilities. But older women in higher level professional positions are able to show ambivalence towards the disciplining of new women when they fail to carry out their familial socializing duties. Thus women's age and higher positions in their

⁴¹ I will further elaborate on new women's spending on the natal family in the next chapter, where I construct such practices of new women as a symbolic capital of 'good daughterhood'.

careers also provide them with increased negotiation power to (re)do respectable femininity.

However, new women's negotiations are neither unitary nor homogeneous. Semi-extended households are more common among younger married participants, and may be a stepping stone towards establishing a nuclear home. There are variations in new women's co-opting of MILs for childcare, as some talk about household help taking most of the childcare responsibility, while others primarily depend on the MIL. And women of different ages and marital status approach socializing norms differently. In addition, I have also demonstrated that new women's families respond differently to their (re)doings of respectability, according to in-laws' asset richness, MILs' willingness to provide childcare/previous experience of work etc. Often, although women's own families are more accepting of their negotiations, the wider extended families/society may be more critical of women's negotiations, thus new women's families are not the ultimate arbitrators of women's respectable practices within the family. In this chapter I have used evidence of new women's individual negotiations which require varied amounts of boundary work to establish a 50-50 work-home life balance as respectable. New women's access to privileged resources (in this case, the family's class structure, asset richness of in-laws) is also important in their negotiation. Therefore, I have demonstrated that in order to understand how change is brought about, attention needs to be paid to critics of new women, such as boundary keepers, and structural resources, such as previous generations' asset richness, which provide a context for different ways of (re)doing respectability among new women. However, I also argue that in this alternative form of respectability, older accountability structures still remain unchanged, as women are still expected to carry out household

chores, but new women have found ways to navigate through these expectations and give their careers as much importance as their families.

So far I have discussed the two aspects of (re)doing respectability defined by the majority of my participants as constitutive of their new woman identity. In the next chapter, I turn to more radical (re)doings and transgression which I reveal through analysis of my data, and which were not identified by participants themselves in chapter five.

Chapter 8: (Re)doing Womanhood: Pushing the Boundaries of Respectability... the Potential of Transgression

Introduction

In this chapter I address how participants (re)do respectable femininity by outwardly conforming to the normative order, but privately transgressing it. Due to the concealed and reworked nature of these transgressive practices, they were not identified by the participants themselves, but emerged from my analysis of their accounts. Normative conceptions of middle-class respectability in Bangladesh require women to be caring, self-sacrificing, and play a major role in the everyday running of the household. Such an outlook also constructs marriage and motherhood as mandatory aspects of respectable middle-class women's lives (Karim, 2012). Drawing from the concept of female individualization (Kim, 2012), in this chapter I focus on how participants reconstruct self-fulfillment goals, delaying motherhood and marriage as respectable practices of Bengali affluent middle-class new women. My analysis of the data highlights that respectability and individualism come together in participants' accounts to construct their identity of new womanhood. I demonstrate that through diverse individual practices new women navigate the boundaries of their feminine roles, showing potential for transgression, articulated in relation to their caring responsibilities, but cannot necessarily pursue completely autonomous self-invention and freedom from such roles. The chapter answers my final research question: *to what extent are the new women of Bangladesh transgressing norms of respectable femininity and how?*

In South Asia normative conceptions of respectability oblige middle-class women to conform to their moral duty of caring for others, self-sacrificing and keeping the family happy above individual goals of educational or professional success, or any other individual activities or pursuits which do not include the family (Radhakrishnan, 2011:150–152). Any consumer spending that is disconnected from the family is also constructed as akin to the ‘troubling’ consumption of the elite or labelled as ‘Western’ individualistic practice (Radhakrishnan, 2009:205), thus unrespectable spending behaviour. In India new women in the IT sector are bound within norms of timely marriage (in their twenties) and motherhood is considered middle-class women’s moral duty (ibid.:127; De Neve, 2011:65). But some are able to show ambivalence towards them by being involved in romantic relationships and not being concerned about criticism from extended family about not having children (Radhakrishnan, 2011). Similarly in Bangladesh respectable middle-class women are expected to be docile, submissive, caring, sacrificing and ensure smooth running of the home. ‘*Oshurjosporsha*’ (the woman untouched by the sun) is an old term that resonates ideas of respectable ‘good woman’ within the home (Karim, 2012:89). Bangladeshi society upholds marriage normativity and mandatory motherhood as essential to middle-class respectable femininity (ibid.). Indeed motherhood has been identified as the only social identity of women regardless of class (Nahar and Richters, 2011). Urban middle-class childless women consider themselves ‘half woman’, and incomplete. Cultural and economic capitals such as a PhD and successful career cannot ‘complete’ a woman, in the ways that motherhood can (ibid.:333). ‘Marriage normativity’ in Bangladeshi society defines the society, where social formation is built on acceptance of institutions such as the ‘heterosexual patriarchal monogamous family unit, family and marriage’ (Karim, 2012:6). Marriage is considered a woman’s religious ‘duty’, a

site of fulfilling femininity and sexual desire (ibid.:128). Particularly monogamous marriage as opposed to some working-class polygamous marriage practices and the upper-class and Western society' patterns of broken marriage and remarriage, establish the middle class's moral supremacy and respectability in Bangladesh (Sabur, 2010:129).

I draw from the concept of 'female individualization' (McRobbie, 2009) and its emergence in Asia, where Kim (2012) claims that neoliberal gendered socio-economic changes such as education, profession, migration etc. enable women to produce alternative social, cultural and symbolic relations which define the kind of self they want to become and wish to live as (ibid.:1). But female individualization is culture-bound and precarious. Asian women have to strategically plan and skillfully juggle responsibilities of unpaid family care and profession to maintain control over their lives. They do so through postponing marriage and childcare, claiming divorce, weakening bonds with extended kin etc. Such an understanding is contrary to European or Western understanding of individualization that assumes individuals are autonomous and independent, free from family and care work (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Beck, 2002). Rather female individualization highlights the complexity of the dialogical process of identity of women between 'being there for others' and 'living one's own life', which 'neither closes the avenue for change for women', nor holds 'wide open' the possibility to emerge as fully free individuals (Kim, 2012:10). I propose, this dialogical nature of female individualization is similar to (re)doing respectability. New women legitimize their dominant class position through their educational and professional achievements, investing capitals in themselves and their families, this in turn sanctions their capacity to negotiate and potentially transgress normative boundaries of respectability, measured in relation to their selfless caring

roles in the family, motherhood and marriage norms. In so doing, new women gain control over their time, income and life choices. There is a small set of literature which highlights the capacity of middle-class women to reconstruct respectable femininity in relation to exploring the self through careers, leisure activities, non-heterosexual relationships (Karim, 2010; 2012), handling the stigma of childlessness (Nahar and Richters, 2011) and broken marriages (Parvez, 2011) in Bangladesh. Azim (2007) claims that it is important for us to ‘read’ these women in a way that brings out the empowering factors in their lives, which reconstitute the cultural contours that surround them.

Here I argue that respondents (re)do respectability in different ways, introducing various forms of new womanhoods, whereby some show the potential for making more radical changes to their identities as new woman than others. I discuss these sites of potential transgression in three areas⁴². In the first section on *self-fulfillment and investment in the self*, I argue that participants reconstruct some practices of individualization such as, autonomous control over time, spending and leisure activities to be incorporated within their construction of respectable femininity. In the second section, *delaying motherhood*, I demonstrate how participants postpone marriage due to constraints of time derived from professional and educational commitments, financial affordability and caring responsibilities towards other family members. In terms of *delaying marriage*, participants provide the same reasons as delaying motherhood and add their desire for homogamy and maintenance of class

⁴² I have organized these practices according to their radicalness. Delaying marriage is the most radical of the choices as it is harder to find a reason to remain single (as career goals are not an acceptable reason for staying single in Bangladesh yet), while delaying or defying motherhood can be blamed on infertility, and pursuing self-fulfilment and personal growth are embedded in neoliberal culture of consumerism and global lifestyle, which are markers of affluent middle-class community of Bangladesh.

privilege as a reason to postpone marriage. Yet, overall participants' new womanhoods still remain embedded within class and gender normativity.

Constructing New Womenhoods

Participants' discussions of negotiating and potentially transgressing normative structures of middle-class respectability consisted of three important elements. Firstly, they mentioned their capital accrual, conversion and deployment strategies for themselves and their families, legitimizing their dominant class position. Secondly, they detailed how legitimizing capitals enabled them to achieve a symbolic position in society in relation to their class dominance which at least partly sanctioned their unrespectable practices, colonizing them as respectable; finally, their accounts also illuminate how their (re)doings are resisted or criticized by their family and society at large, thus is a work in progress. I start the section with participants' self-fulfillment and personal growth, as this aspect, although the least radical of the three renegotiations, resonates throughout in the following sections of the chapter.

Self-Fulfillment and Investment in the Self

Here I discuss the eleven married participants with children; Butterfly (32), Life (40), Independent (38), Free Spirit (34), Hope (34), Destiny's Child (35), Decision Maker (35), Fighter (40), Flower (39), Caller (45) and Singing Bird (38). Participants' comments demonstrate how they are able to invest in the self and pursue self-fulfillment through autonomous control over their time and income and engage in leisure activities. They also highlight how they engage in such practices of personal and professional growth despite being married and being mothers, while the rest of the

participants, discussed in later sections of the chapter, consider marriage and motherhood as obstacles to personal and professional growth.

Although there seems to be a widespread awareness of the financial security new women derive from paid work, participants also claim to gain the capacity for autonomous spending due to their professions. Forty-five-year-old Caller is the oldest participant in this research and has been in paid employment for 23 years. She is a mother of four and an entrepreneur, running two businesses simultaneously. Caller explains her reasons behind working as follows:

‘My father died when I was 11 and my brother 4. My mother was widowed at only 28! It was very difficult in those days for a single mother to raise her children. She had to take loans, and rely on our extended family’s charity to give us good education. I did not ever want to be in that situation. So I made sure despite all the setbacks, such as each time I had a baby or when I had to spend a year in Australia with my husband for his Masters, I could never just quit my work. I wanted to be able to afford the best things for me and my kids even if I did not have my husband with me. Now I am able to afford whatever I like without even consulting my family. I am sending my daughter to Canada for university; my husband does not want it, because honestly he cannot afford it. But I can, so I will.’ (Caller, 45)

This is the least radical comment on the individualization process of new women. Caller clearly conforms to the normative conception of middle-class respectable femininity which requires women to invest capitals in their family. However, it is not the spending on her family which gives her self-satisfaction, rather her autonomous

decisions about spending that constitutes her self-satisfaction. Caller sees herself as autonomous in spending her income and taking decisions for her family, without having to depend on anyone, particularly her husband. This is a notable breakthrough from the self-sacrificing wife who upholds her moral superiority through devoting her life to playing the caring role for her family, demonstrated by Caller's mother's sacrifice when she became a widow. Caller's claim to respectability, which is different from her mother's generation of women, is derived from her economic self-reliance. But this economic self-reliance was not easily achievable for Caller. She talks of 'setbacks' which are associated with her familial duties, such as giving birth or performing the good wife duty of accompanying her husband when he went abroad for higher education. Motherhood is a mandatory norm of respectability in Bangladesh, while her husband's foreign education adds cultural capital to Caller's family. Thus Caller conforms to her family's capital accumulation strategy and to the motherhood norms of respectable femininity, while also achieving autonomous decision making and spending privileges which maintain her self-fulfillment goals.

Forty-year-old Fighter goes further than Caller and explains consumptions patterns focused on the self and family as a source of self-fulfillment:

'I am not just a mother and a wife. I am an individual myself! I need to fulfil my own wishes. I go to theatres, musical shows on my own as my husband is not into these. I can buy any clothes or jewellery I like...I can even buy a car if I think me and my children need it. The ability to fulfil my wishes myself without having to ask anyone is a big plus point in working women's lives.'

(Fighter, 40)

The 'self' and its desires become prominent in Fighter's comment as she uses terms such as 'I', 'my wishes' and 'I can' to add value to herself and her own wishes and pursuits. She spends her earnings on cultural capitals such as theatres, musical shows, clothes and jewellery and can accrue further economic capitals for herself and her family such as a car and jewellery. Her autonomous spending decisions add capital value to herself and her family, while she also retains control over her time, enabling her to enjoy leisure activities. Fighter's negotiation of boundaries of respectability in relation to 'being there for others' allows her to include autonomous spending, control over her own time and leisure activities as part of her respectable practice of 'living one's own life' in her own terms. However, like Caller, Fighter simultaneously conforms to norms of respectability, as she chooses to spend her income on things such as a car which she and her children may need, as opposed to just things that she needs herself.

Younger participants go as far as calling themselves 'selfish' in their pursuit of self-interests such as leisure activities. For thirty-five-year-old Destiny's Child her career, time with friends and travels are an important source of her self-identity:

'I cannot give up my job, my time out with my friends or the occasional trips I take with just my husband leaving my children with my mother-in-law. All these bits are important for me and my satisfaction with life...for this people may think women of our generation are more selfish than previous generations of women.' (Destiny's Child, 35)

Similarly, for thirty-eight-year-old Singing Bird her creative activities give her self-fulfillment:

‘It is not my familial duties that define the whole of me!...I have as much of a creative stance as careerist. I write...I always loved Yoga; these are all parts of me. I have published my first novel and teach Yoga and Pilates at a local club. If I was not able to maintain all these sides of myself, I would be a very unhappy person. These help me grow as an individual.’ (Singing Bird, 38)

Both *Destiny’s Child* and *Singing Bird* associate activities unrelated to their work or familial duties as constituting their self-fulfillment. *Destiny’s Child* talks about hanging out with friends and foreign travel (along with her career), while *Singing Bird* mentions hobbies such as yoga and writing. Although these activities allow them to carve out some time and space for themselves outside their work and home commitments, they also reinstate their class status. I have demonstrated in chapter seven how hanging out with friends and foreign travel are new consumption practices which mark affluent middle-class’s social status in neoliberal Bangladesh. Such consumption practices also enable *Destiny’s Child* to convert her economic capital from her earnings to invest in the social and cultural capitals of friends and foreign travel. At the same time *Singing Bird* converts her cultural capital of creative skills into economic capital of income (being a published novelist and a Yoga teacher) for herself and possibly her family, which are both signs of investment on the self or adding value to the self and possibly the family. Thus through conversion of capitals and continuous investment in the self, participants claim the capacity to negotiate autonomous control over their time, which they want to spend outside work or home commitments. Yet, by acknowledging that due to such practices *Destiny’s Child* may be considered ‘selfish’ by others, she recognizes that she may be perceived to be outside the boundaries of normative conceptions of middle-class respectability.

Some others mention working out to stay fit as part of their personal growth; Hope goes to a gym while Flower takes occasional work out classes. I have demonstrated in chapters five and six that investment in the body is a form of cultural capital, derived from the large scale economic and cultural shifts of neoliberal times that expect middle-class women to maintain a certain kind of body.

‘I need to take care of myself as much as I care for others.’ (Hope, 34)

‘It’s a habit I maintained from my life in the USA, when I did not have my daughter... It’s just a bit of time that I have to myself.’ (Flower, 39)

There is a clear shift in perspectives of new women living their lives for others and living their own lives through spending time on grooming and taking care of their bodies. I have demonstrated in chapter seven, that there are multiple demands on participants’ time from their family, work and socializing duties. Hope and Flower recognize the demands of their caring roles through referring to ‘caring for others’ and having more time for themselves before having children. Yet they are both able to negotiate time for themselves to pursue fitness goals. Flower and Hope are negotiating autonomous control over their time as constitutive of their new womanhood. Other participants, Free Spirit, Life, Decision Maker and Independent also talked about autonomous spending on consumer goods for themselves, such as clothing and beauty treatments. But their self-fulfillment was primarily derived from the fact that they had access to income which they could spend autonomously, and much of their spending was actually geared towards the family, such as furniture, children’s extracurricular activities etc.

Vested with the source of moral authority, the middle-class self constantly attaches value to the self, whereby the 'self is never a whole', and 'always in extension' (Skeggs, 2004a:80). This value added process is dependent on middle-class taste and cultural competency to identify the objects and practices that are valuable, thus legitimizing capitals that constitute distinction (ibid.:79). Facilitated by gendered socio-economic changes in Bangladesh, this value-adding process enables new women to reconstruct some practices of individualization, such as autonomous control over time and spending and leisure activities to be incorporated within their construction of respectable femininity. My analysis shows that new women add value to themselves and their family through legitimating capitals, such as cars, clothes, jewellery, theatres, musical shows and foreign education for children and so on, all of which are representative of their affluent middle-class taste and cultural practice. They are also able to convert their economic and cultural capitals to symbolic capitals of middle-class cultural superiority, through writing a novel (intellectual privilege) and investing in the body through staying fit (cultural capital). Thus the practices of self-fulfillment and investment on the self, identified by the new women, continually reinstate their class position. When it comes to new women's autonomous control over their money and time, there is a discrepancy between womanhood and the autonomous thinking self (Gilligan, 1977). Choosing the individual self over others is associated with masculinity, while interdependence of love and care are associated with femininity (ibid.:482). The 'caring self' whereby women take care of others is a feminine cultural capital, through which women become respectable (Skeggs, 1997:72). But new women's autonomous spending and control over their time spent on themselves require them to conduct boundary work, (re)doing their selfless caring duties, and redefining self-fulfillment through individualization of the self as a

respectable practice. They are well aware that they may be considered ‘selfish’ by others. Yet they are also able to introduce new womenhoods, doing respectability differently, rather than completely transforming norms of respectability.

Delaying Motherhood

Six out of seventeen married participants do not have children yet: Flora (32), Freedom (35), Brave (35), Integrity (38), Happy (38) and Informed (35). Their ages vary from 33 to 38 years. Considering the mandatory motherhood norm of respectability in Bangladesh, the fact that about 35% of the married participants of this research are voluntarily delaying motherhood requires further exploration. It is primarily socio-economic opportunities that motivate women to postpone childcare in order to actualize individualization goals of rising aspirations for material wellbeing, higher education and occupational mobility. Participants provide three sets of reasons for delaying motherhood: constraints of time due to professional and educational commitments, financial affordability and caring responsibilities towards other family members. As in the last section and chapter seven, participants conform to norms of investment on the self and family, maintaining class privilege, and these performances of good wife, daughter and daughter-in-law (previously indicated in chapter seven) may be what enable them to delay motherhood. It is notable that none of them completely defy motherhood, it is always imagined as a future state, and all of them are aware that their family and society at large consider them outside the boundaries of respectability due to their childless status.

At a general level, constraint of time due to aspirations of higher education and occupational progress, thus investment in cultural and economic capitals, are identified as the primary reasons for delaying motherhood. Flora and Informed are in

the younger strata of the participants, aged 33 and 35 respectively, and reasoned in favour of their career and educational goals:

‘Once my husband and I reach our desired position at work we will think about having a baby.’ (Flora, 33);

‘After our marriage I was away doing my PhD, and now I am back in Dhaka, but my husband is in the UK doing his PhD...I plan to have a baby once he is back and we are a bit more settled here in Dhaka.’ (Informed, 35)

Things are not so different for older participants as they give the same reasons of individual achievements and aspirations for renegotiating early motherhood. Thirty-eight-year-old Happy is a Senior Lecturer at a private university in Dhaka and she acknowledges that having a baby now may disrupt her plans to pursue a PhD:

‘I can’t afford to have a baby now, I don’t mean financially, I mean considering where I want to be in life and where I have reached so far. I don’t want to have a baby before I finish my PhD. Without a PhD, a teaching career in higher education will go nowhere! A child requires a lot of time and attention, which is impossible for me to manage with my job...my plans of a PhD, which will have to be in a foreign country, where I probably will have to go alone, as my husband works here, which makes planning a baby very difficult... I simply do not know how I will fit raising a child in my plans for the next few years of my life!’ (Happy, 38)

At the time of the interview, Happy’s priorities were further investment in her individual aspirations in relation to educational and professional goals, for which she

was monitoring and managing her gender role by postponing motherhood and associated childcare responsibilities. Happy is clear that motherhood would compromise her professional success (economic capital), and future educational plans (cultural capital to be transferred to economic capital of professional success). She suggests that it is not the birth of a child per se that would be problematic, but the work as primary carer that she would be expected to do afterwards and the time and energy that would impinge on her professional and education goals. She recognizes the responsibility associated with childcare as a mother's duty, making demands that she is not willing to take on at the moment. It is worth mentioning that when I went back to Happy for the second phase of interviews after eight months, she still had not applied for a PhD, or changed her plan of postponing motherhood. Considering Happy is 38 and a PhD takes up to 4 years, it may be that Happy's plan of delaying motherhood to do her PhD is only a reasonable rationale to present to 'society'; a mechanism to hide her perpetual ambivalence towards motherhood. Thus although on the surface Happy is (re)doing respectability through negotiating the mandatory motherhood norm, in actuality, she may be bargaining for scope to transgress the norm of mandatory motherhood.

Like Happy, thirty-eight-year-old Integrity also reasons in favour of her professional growth for delaying motherhood. She also adds the important aspect of in-law involvement in childcare, which is perceived differently by different participants.

'...I cannot be fully involved in my child's upbringing now considering the stage of life I am in. I don't know how I will sort the household management, childcare and my two jobs! I will probably end up depending on my in-laws for childcare; I am not particularly fond of that idea. I have very different

values from my in-laws, so I think it's best to wait a few more years till I have reached a level where I can let go of some of my work responsibilities to spend more time at home.' (Integrity, 38)

Integrity speaks of constraints of time due to her professional commitments, thus accrual of economic capital, which will oblige her to depend on her in-laws for childcare. In chapter seven I have demonstrated how using boundary keepers of respectability, such as in-laws, to maintain a 50-50 work-home life balance is a common practice among married new women who have children. However, in Integrity's case she stresses that this dependency on extended family is not something she approves of, as her values are different from theirs. Her reluctance to use boundary keepers who may substitute her childcare responsibilities thus enabling her to maintain her professional commitments, is a setback in embarking on motherhood. I would again construct Integrity's reasoning for delaying motherhood as ambivalence towards motherhood, and thus a possible route to transgressing mandatory motherhood. Integrity is 38, an associate professor (she already has a PhD, unlike Happy) and an active feminist, thus her professional achievements are greater than several other participants of this research. She invokes a time in the future when she can let go of some responsibilities at work to assume motherhood, but she is not at all specific about this.

Financial constraints linked to economic responsibilities for family members were also given as factors explaining delayed motherhood. Thirty-five-year-old Brave explains:

'My father was a government officer, and we had a very modest upbringing. My older brother, on whom my parents depended for old age support,

abandoned them and has completely cut off all contacts with them. As the only professional daughter I have complete responsibility for my parents and younger brother now. I hold a Deputy General Manager position and earn more than enough to contribute financially... My husband and I live in my in-laws' house and have minimal expenses, so he does not mind how I spend my money. I want my brother to finish his education and get a good job so he can support my parents. Only then can I think about starting my own family.' (Brave, 35)

Brave constructs her breadwinner role, as a 'good daughter', as an obstacle to assuming motherhood; she has had to take on her older brother's role and responsibilities in her natal family. By providing for her family financially, Brave is not only helping her family through economic capital but also assuming the symbolic role of a good daughter, who cares for her family in multiple ways (both economically and through a feminine caring role) no less than a son. Brave uses her financial and symbolic investment in her family to negotiate the boundaries of mandatory motherhood. Her case indicates a significant transformation in Bangladeshi society, where instead of a son, a daughter can also take financial responsibility for her natal family. At the same time, it also indicates the permeability of the boundaries of respectable femininity in relation to motherhood. It's worth noting that in Brave's case a woman's identity as mother is only temporarily replaced by her duties as a good daughter, as she says once her younger brother is able to support her family she can think about motherhood.

Freedom, aged 35, also gives a similar reasoning:

‘My parents were unhappy in their marriage for a long time. My mother stayed in her marriage because she had three daughters and thought it would be difficult for us to find a suitable groom coming from a broken family. When I returned to Bangladesh after my degree in Canada, I encouraged her to seek separation from my father and stayed with her until I got married....now after my marriage I still run my mother’s household entirely (financially) and contribute to my family with my husband. So financially it is impossible for me to think of a baby now.’ (Freedom, 35)

Freedom’s multiple financial responsibilities play a vital role in her negotiation with mandatory motherhood. Freedom does not invoke any future arrangement for her mother to be able to carry out her own expenses. This suggests that Freedom may always have to support her mother financially, thus it is difficult to evaluate when she would actually be able to financially support a baby. It may be that Freedom is ambivalent towards motherhood, using her financial responsibility towards her mother as a negotiation strategy against the mandatory motherhood norm. And like Brave, Freedom also emphasizes her good daughter role, a source of symbolic and economic capital for her mother. Freedom reasons that her mother tolerated much suffering for her and her sisters, and now she has the responsibility to support her mother. Unlike Brave, Freedom does not have any brothers and her two older sisters are currently not in paid employment. Being at least temporarily childfree helps Brave and Freedom carry out their responsibilities towards their family.

All these accounts may be read at face value as being about a desire for motherhood being thwarted by circumstances. And of course these women might well become mothers in the future. However, at the least they are significantly delaying motherhood

and in doing so re-inventing the trajectory of new women's lives. They can also be read as expressing ambivalence towards motherhood which may result in perpetual postponement and ensuing childlessness. At the moment they may be read as disguising a choice to be child-free that cannot be spoken. Certainly this (re)doing of mandatory motherhood results in disciplining remarks of shock and disappointment from family and even strangers. Happy shares the following incident where she was interrogated by a stranger she met at a wedding, who ultimately advised her to have a baby as soon as possible:

'I don't understand what is the big fuss about having kids among us Bengalis? Recently I went to a wedding, and the first question an elderly lady sitting next to me at the dinner table asked was if I was married. I said yes, and her next question was if I had any children, I said no. She asked how long I have been married, I answered nearly 8 years, and she was completely shocked. She made such a face and told me directly that I was making a big mistake and should have a baby as soon as possible. Who the hell is she to decide what I should or should not do? But that's our society for you! So I become quite Western in these cases, I just ignore these comments and never let them bother me.'

(Happy, 38)

Happy's comment illuminates how boundaries of respectability through mandatory motherhood are policed not just by the family, but by society at large in Bangladesh. And any instance of possible transgression may be disciplined by society. But Happy links her capacity to ignore people's shock towards her choice to postpone motherhood to a Western approach, implying that Bengali women may allow such comments to cause distress or may actually give in to pressure from society to have a baby. Thus

Happy constructs her identity as a new woman who resembles what she identified as self-assured and free Western women, who take their own decisions and ignore policing of traditional gender roles. It is this capacity to ignore the disciplining and policing of women into normative gender roles that constitutes her identification of new womanhood, and the capacity to (re)do mandatory motherhood.

Integrity also reveals how she has deliberately built a personality of a ‘non-traditional’ woman in her family, which allows her to avoid any confrontation from family about her choice of postponing motherhood.

‘My in-laws knew within a few months of our marriage that I am not the traditional wife or daughter-in-law, and I am glad they did so. I am not saying there aren’t difficult moments. I live in the same building as my parents-in-law, brother-in-law and his family. My sister-in-law has two lovely children, and I often spend time with them. I know very well that my in-laws and even my own parents probably wonder when or if I will ever have children of my own. I just managed to build such a persona that they never ask me directly.’
(Integrity, 38)

Integrity associates motherhood (at the right time) as a ‘traditional’ practice, and she sees herself as a ‘non-traditional’, hence new woman, and through maintaining a certain persona is able to avoid any direct confrontation about her choice in this regard. Through presenting herself as non-traditional Integrity rearticulates her self-identity as an autonomous and agential being, who can choose to delay assuming the role of a mother by choice, yet not defy it. Not all participants succeed in adopting this strategy of building a shield of agential and independent personality to avoid disciplining

related to delaying motherhood, and may instead bank on other familial situations which help them escape confrontation. Freedom provides an alternative example:

‘As the eldest daughter-in-law I know my mother-in-law expects me to have a baby pretty soon. Though I do not yet feel any pressure from her, if my younger sister-in-law (wife of husband’s younger brother) gets pregnant, I have a feeling I will start getting direct confrontation in this regard. Until then, I am happily avoiding this topic.’ (Freedom, 35)

Freedom has previously expressed her financial responsibility towards her mother as her grounds for delaying motherhood. But in this comment, Freedom suggests that although financial responsibility may work as a reason for now, if another, particularly younger, member of her in-laws’ family assumes motherhood, then Freedom will automatically be forced to conform to motherhood. Thus not only do women negotiate with the norm of mandatory motherhood in heterogeneous ways, their choices of postponing motherhood are only temporarily sanctioned within existing gender norms of middle-class respectability.

It is important to note that all six participants postponing motherhood said they still hope to be a mother someday. None of them talked about voluntary childlessness, thus transgressing mandatory motherhood, as an option in their lives. This is interesting considering that two of these participants are 38 years old and their age may reduce their chances of pregnancy in future. I identify two reasons why participants may not be able to openly transgress mandatory motherhood in Bangladesh. Firstly, the middle class are expected to pass on their lifestyle and assets to the next generation through descendants. New women may be reluctant to express their ambivalence towards

participating in this classed behaviour of producing the next generation, particularly as middle-class mothers are perceived to be carrying the 'true spirit' of Bengali *shamaj* (community), and hold centre position in their classed society safeguarding honour and prestige and teaching the next generation Bengali norms (Karim, 2012:59). Middle-class mothers' practice and training of children in cultural norms constitute the symbolic capitals of the Bengali middle class's moral superiority and respectability (ibid.:59). Secondly, Nahar and Richters (2011) demonstrated that in Bangladesh childlessness whether voluntary or involuntary, puts women in a stigmatized position due to their inability to reproduce. They also face marital duress, dissolution, abandonment, social isolation and even domestic violence (ibid.:328). In their study they present a very small number of urban middle-class women who identify themselves as Western in their desire to be free from childcare responsibilities, who voluntarily reject motherhood, but hide their decision from society, and blame their childlessness on infertility to gain acceptance and maintain respectability in society (ibid.:331).

Due to these reasons, despite new women participants' individual aspirations and goals they are reluctant to openly transgress mandatory motherhood and assume identities of individualistic and free women, which is often perceived as a Western practice and unrespectable. However, all participants are reflexive of their choices being perceived as unrespectable and the instances of disciplining that they endure due to their choice. I recognize younger new women's choice of delaying motherhood as a negotiation, while older new women's ambivalence towards motherhood as having a potential to be read as a disguised form of transgression and a renegotiation of mandatory motherhood. Such disguised transgression of norms of respectability resonate with female individualization processes in Asia where women 'strategically

plan, avidly self-monitor and manage a life of their own' around neoliberal economy, reluctant to risk labour market participation (Kim, 2012:9).

Delaying Marriage

In this section I will discuss another subset of my participants, the three single (never married) and one divorced respondents. They are: Complete (32), Modernity (35), Instinct (35) and Nest (34) respectively. The average age of marriage for women in Bangladesh is 18.7, just above the legal age of marriage which is 18 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012a:19). For urban middle-class women the 'right' age of marriage has changed over time, in the 1970s the right age was before a girl finished her tertiary education (which led to brides never finishing tertiary education), today the right age is - 23–27 years, which is after a girl finishes her tertiary education and often postgraduate degrees (Sabur, 2010:133). The currently unmarried respondents are all aged between 32 and 35 years of age, which is considered well beyond the standard age of marriage for women in Bangladesh. The ability of the three participants to postpone marriage until their 30s and the ability of Nest to claim divorce, which causes loss of respect for women and their family, opens the opportunity to study how some women are able to renegotiate with norms of marriage normativity in Bangladesh. It is also notable that postponing marriage until their 30s and claiming divorce are both identified as part of female individualization caused by a neoliberal turn in Asia (Kim, 2012). Participants reasoning for delaying marriage can be grouped into three broad categories. The first two resonate with the discussions in previous sections, participants' individual professional and educational goals in life; and caring responsibilities towards their natal family. The third reason given is not being able to find a suitable groom, with matching class status, which new women

consider a sign of their potential life partner's acceptance of women's professional roles and not constraining them within the family.

Thirty-two-year-old Complete has a postgraduate degree from Germany, previously ran her own beauty salon and has also worked in an international research organization. After her return from Germany, Complete changed her career entirely and now is a television show host and works in advertising and public relations. Complete prioritizes her career goals over marriage, which she presents as an obstacle to career success:

'I had to fight really hard with a lot of people including my parents to remain single, pursue my education abroad and focus on my career. But my parents finally gave in and today they are extremely proud of my achievements... I travelled to so many countries of the world during my postgraduate degree in Europe. Upon my return I have now become a television talk show host, along with a second full-time job, so I have a very hectic work schedule. But all of this would be difficult or maybe even impossible if I was married and had children. I would then have to consider if my husband would come with me on my travels, we may not have been able to afford two people's expenses, or if I had a child I probably wouldn't want to do any of these things at all and would choose to stay home with my baby. I wouldn't have half the mobility and flexibility I have now, if I was married!' (Complete, 32)

Complete refers to her individual achievements in relation to cultural capitals of foreign education, travel opportunities and public space mobility, and economic capital of various professions, all of which are signs of her affluent middle-class status.

Responsibility towards a husband and children is defined in terms of the constraints of caring roles and increased expenses. Complete says if she had a baby she herself may not want to travel at all but would choose to prioritize her caring role and stay at home with the baby. And if she was married without children, it might still be impossible for her to afford the higher travel expenses for two people. Thus for Complete, her singlehood provides her with the flexibility to fulfil self-aspirations and legitimize capitals without having to face constraints of time and expenses associated with family life.

Similarly thirty-five-year-old Modernity has worked for various development organizations and travels within and outside Bangladesh regularly as part of her job. She also expressed her preference for the ‘flexibility’ of her single status in relation to career progression:

‘I did not get married at the right time. It was my choice to delay it. I decided as the eldest child I want to stay in Bangladesh with my parents so I can support them in their old age. I also knew with my educational background I would do much better here, and progress much faster as opposed to a Western country, where I would have to start from scratch... All the marriage proposals that would come for me in my 20s were from potential grooms living abroad, so I always said no to those...everyone used to be disappointed that I am rejecting such good proposals, my parents also used to remain anxious about my marriage... now that I have reached a certain age and have built a prestigious career, my parents are happy to just let me do whatever I like. Not being married gave me so much more flexibility in terms of career progression,

which I might not have been able to do if I was married or had children.’

(Modernity, 35)

For Modernity the decision to reject marriage proposals of potential grooms living abroad is not just represented in terms of pursuing professional progress in Bangladesh, but her caring responsibilities towards her natal family. Her comment explains that she made a conscious choice to stay close to her parents so she could support them in their old age. Although Modernity presents marriage and children as obstacles to professional ‘flexibility’, she does not associate caring roles towards her own parents as an obstacle. It is also worth mentioning that Modernity has a younger brother who lives abroad. Modernity’s decision was also influenced by the fact that at least one of the siblings should stay near their parents, and the fact that she chose to be the one is also representative of her ‘good daughter’ role, thus a symbolic capital, for her family. By rejecting marriage proposals Modernity was negotiating with the norm of marriage normativity in her 20s, but by prioritizing her caring role towards her family and making her parents happy about her ‘prestigious’ career she is conforming to the norms of respectable good daughterhood, investing economic and symbolic capital (prestige and care) in her family.

Both Modernity’s and Complete’s comments suggest delaying marriage when women are at their ‘right’ marriageable age is particularly difficult, as they face resistance from their families. Complete had to ‘fight really hard’ while Modernity caused ‘disappointment and anxiety’ to her parents. Thus normative standards of respectability still require women to get married at the ‘right age’, which is identified as the 20s by participants. But Modernity’s and Complete’s comments highlight that once new women cross the ‘right age’ of marriage and reach their 30s, they gain the

respect of their family through accruing various cultural capitals which allows them to do 'whatever they like' or further negotiate or renegotiate the conditions of marriage normativity

Negotiation of marriage normativity includes struggling to find an 'appropriate' groom for participants to expand and articulate their middle-class position. Thirty-five-year-old Instinct possesses a high composition of cultural and economic capitals. This seems to have become an obstacle for her to find a groom with an appropriate composition of class capitals:

'I come from a very educated family. I have studied in Cambridge and the University of Warwick. I hold a lecturer position at the National University in Bangladesh. I cannot marry just anyone! All the proposals of marriage that come now are not from the type of men or families which match mine. I do not want to be married to a man who will hold me back in terms of my career or independence. If someone has not achieved the things I have in my career in their own field of work, they will never understand the importance of these accomplishments and the hard work that goes behind them... Since I have not found a man like that yet, I am still single.' (Instinct, 35)

Instinct's comment suggests that women try to further maintain and invest in their class status through matrimony. She is not only guided by her own economic and cultural resources in her choice of a groom, but she is also keen to maximize her status by searching for a spouse with suitable socio-economic resources. Following (Bourdieu, 1990) I define this practice as homogamy, whereby people choose to marry within their social group to reinforce their own social status. Instinct puts emphasis on

the qualifications of prospective husbands as a marker of their class, which in turn may also stand for their support or acceptance of their own wife's career success, a symbolic capital of affluent middle class.⁴³

Similarly, Modernity regards a husband's disapproval of a wife's choice of lifestyle as a 'traditional' mindset, unacceptable to her new woman outlook:

'I will not tolerate a husband who will discourage me to pursue my life the way I want. I certainly won't change my life because my husband does not think it's right for his wife! Such traditional mindset is unacceptable in this day and age. If my husband says anything like that I will not stay with him any longer.' (Modernity, 35)

Modernity's comment illuminates that she refuses to tolerate a marriage where her preferred lifestyle, which includes markers of her affluent middle-class status, is not appreciated. In fact she goes so far as to say that she will not remain in a marriage where she is unappreciated. Negotiation with marriage normativity includes being able to leave marriages that do not meet new women's expectations.

Neither Modernity nor Instinct were open to considering arranged marriage proposals through family and friends at the time of both phases of interviews. Nor were they interested in dating.⁴⁴ In fact Instinct and Modernity specifically mentioned that they

⁴³ I have demonstrated in chapter five that neoliberal and affluent middle-class women are assumed to hold highly paid jobs in reputed organizations by participants, which have symbolic value in their class construction. Participants perceive that only working-class and upper-class women confine themselves within the home, particularly after marriage and childbirth. Thus here a potential life partner's middle-class status is read in relation to his acceptance of women's career outside the home.

⁴⁴ Dating is fairly popular among the younger generation of Bangladeshis. Contrary to the norm of arranged marriages organized by families, 13 out of 17 married participants of this research had love marriages.

are not actively looking for a groom, and think that when a marriage is meant to happen it will happen. I construct Modernity and Instinct's ambivalence towards finding a suitable marriage partner, as a form of (re)doing of marriage normativity, which has transgressive potential. Both of them may be ultimately reluctant to find a life partner through marriage, and are temporarily postponing marriage through invoking various reasons that serve to maintain respectability. I do not categorize Complete with them, as she was more open to marital options, such as dating.

The only divorced participant in this research is thirty-four-year-old Nest who married her university classmate only to find out within days of her marriage that her husband is impotent. After staying married for three years Nest realized she may never be able to have a baby in a natural way with her husband, and filed for divorce. As a devout Muslim woman Nest found her decision to leave her husband a fairly difficult one. Unlike the three participants mentioned above, Nest appears to be single only because her marriage did not work, rather than consciously choosing singlehood for career progression or lack of opportunity of finding a suitable husband. In fact Nest reveals in the following statement that she is a believer in marriage and romantic love, and is looking forward to being married again:

‘My divorce is an unfortunate incident in my life. But as an educated, professional woman I wasn’t going to stay in a marriage with an impotent man, for fear of society’s stigmatization! He hid that factor from me before marriage, if anyone should be blamed for the broken marriage it is him. I had to take a decision based on what I want from life. And I always wanted to be a mother. When I found out after staying with him for almost three years that his

condition means I may never have the chance to become a mother I decided to end it!’ (Nest, 34)

Nest’s education and profession provide her with the negotiation power to take decisions about her own life and reject society’s stigmatization. Her choice of ending her marriage is derived from her very conformity to marriage and motherhood normativity, as she hopes to get married and become a mother eventually.

Returning to the never married participants, seeking to renegotiate the ‘right age’ of marriage was not straightforward as Complete and Modernity faced resistance from family members. Though some are able to convert their family’s resistance to support through capital accrual and conversion, they all agree that despite this support there is a constant concern about their marriage in their family, and even the wider society. Instinct was most upset about how the pressure from extended family and friends on her father to marry off his daughter was causing him physical illness as well as emotional distress.

‘You have no idea the kind of things people can say to the parents of a single woman in her 30s! I have noticed although my father is supportive of my decision, his physical and mental health is deteriorating due to all this pressure from others.’ (Instinct, 35)

By the time of my second phase of interviews, Instinct’s father had passed away and she had returned home, taking a break from her PhD to be with her family for several months. She shared that on her father’s death many relatives and family friends implied that it was particularly sad that Instinct’s father did not see his eldest daughter get married in his lifetime. This shows that although women are able to negotiate

delaying the ‘right age’ of marriage through their education and profession, the expectations of a marriage normative society are still prevalent. It is important to recognize that individuals are located within families and wider kin networks. When studying societies in which families play an important and often dominant role in the marriage process, it is particularly crucial to look beyond individual decisions, to focus on what the marriage of a son or a daughter represents for parents (Sabur, 2010). Thus single new women are torn between their roles as dutiful daughters and independent women. Dutiful daughters are supposed to respond to society’s marriage normativity and the religious ‘duty’ of fulfilling femininity through a conjugal relationship and motherhood. In addition, marriage also creates and expands the social capital of families, which structures their class network. Thus, economically self-sufficient, educated, mobile new women like Instinct pose a threat to not just the marriage normativity of respectable femininity, but also to the role of dutiful daughter who brings social capitals, merging and increasing the size of mutual and symbolic capitals of both her natal and postnatal family (Karim, 2012).

My findings have some resemblance to Karim’s (2010:71) claim that a single woman’s career and education provides her with the ‘respectability’ or ‘acceptability’ to be ‘left alone’ and allows her the choice to live life ‘by her own terms’. New women’s practice of living life on their own terms can be associated with female individualization in Asia, whereby due to rapid socio-economic change in these countries urban women tend to postpone marriage for the sake of a career, transnational mobility and independence, seeking opportunities in international higher education and jobs. This enables them to lead non-traditional, emancipatory and individualized lives, even if temporarily (Kim, 2012:33). Establishing a dialogical relation between individualism and alternative forms of respectability introduced by Bangladeshi new women, I have

highlighted that seeking to reconstruct respectability through individual goals and good daughterhood roles is a process of continuous struggle whereby new women have to navigate disapproval of family and society at large. New women are able to negotiate the idea of good daughterhood, through choosing to take care of parents in their old age. This is another way of constructing the symbolic capital of good daughterhood, in addition to married women economically providing for their natal family, which I discussed in chapter seven. Finally single new women seek to maintain class status through homogamy, which is defined as a type of socially-constituted instinct (*habitus*) whereby people usually marry within their social group or someone close to their own status (Sabur, 2010). Marriage is instrumental in maintaining and expanding social networks, particularly in urban middle-class Bangladesh. ‘Affinal kin allow the expansion of the familial network and the existing matrimonial strategies put both men and women as co-sharers of power, thereby articulating their class position’ (ibid.:170). Thus new women self-aspire to accrue or expand social capital through homogamous matrimony, and when they fail to do so they cause anxiety to their family and endure the disappointment and criticism of extended family and society. Ultimately, single new women do not openly defy marriage, but through capitals bargain for some time to carve out a space for themselves to fulfil their individual professional and educational goals and retain their independence and mobility. We cannot know whether these women will marry in the future, but given Instinct’s and Modernity’s reluctance to consider arranged marriage proposals or dating, they might never marry and as such ultimately transgress the marriage normativity standard of respectability.

Conclusion

Drawing from the accounts of participants discussed in this chapter (and all previous chapters), I argue that new women are renegotiating how they do/perform middle-class womanhood in Bangladesh, introducing alternative forms of middle-class respectability. By analysing new women's heterogeneous constructions of respectable femininity and the diverse meaning they attach to womanhood, I argue that, through the 'project of the self' and significantly postponing motherhood and marriage, participants are disguising their transgression of norms of respectability. I call this disguised transgression because new women's self-presentation of pursuing self-fulfillment goals remain highly feminized, as they spend time on feminized pursuits such as going to theatres, musicals and taking care of the body or they spend money on their family and children. These autonomous and agential pursuits essentially legitimize their class privilege, responding to structures that produce 'other' women living inferior lives. While in terms of delaying motherhood and marriage, new women are still unable to openly disclose their choice of voluntary childfree and single lives, but due in part to some of their age and reluctance towards finding a potential groom. I read their ambivalence as disguised transgression. I also argue that participants' investment in the self through careers and higher education can be read as precarious individualization, which may challenge some notions of femininity but does not 'necessarily hold a privileging logic of self-invention and freedom' (Kim, 2012:12).

West and Zimmerman's (2009) concept of redoing acknowledges agents' alternative ways of doing gender (and class), responding to structural change, but not complete abandonment of normative structures. Similarly female individualization in Asia recognizes the 'partial nature of agency and reflexivity in relation to the relative

openness of the social world and the different restraints on agency in contemporary Asian societies' (Kim, 2012:10). Despite high levels of reflexivity and possibilities of change both at the individual level and in wider society, women's agency is still not completely free from structure and its constraints (ibid.:10). This pattern of partial change has been recognized in some studies in Bangladesh. Research on urban middle-class working women (not new women) in white collar jobs demonstrates that unmarried women find more time for leisure activities, such as watching TV, listening to music, reading, visiting friends, than married women with children (Huda and Akhtar, 2005). However, these leisure activities are mostly pastimes carried out within the home, other than visiting friends. Karim (2012) presented urban new women of Bangladesh as those who grow up developing hobbies and leisure activities, but she did not refer to such pursuits of new women as a constituting factor in their identity construction. I propose that, through autonomous control over spending and leisure activities, all of which also require spending money, new women of this research are colonizing individual pursuits of self-fulfilment as respectable practices of new womanhood: having a public life and investing in the self/pleasing the self. But these practices are still confined within feminine leisure pursuits, maintenance of women's carer roles (albeit through economic and consumer choices), and reinforcing class privilege only adding partial agency and autonomy as part of their respectable identities.

Women's choice of reproductive behaviour is part of the assessment of women's status in the country, along with education, employment, economic autonomy and political participation. Since the country's liberation the Bangladeshi government, along with non-governmental organizations (NGO) and subsidized commercial sectors, has invested in family planning. Statistical data demonstrate that the fertility rate of

women in urban areas has reduced from 3.52 in 1985 to 1.72 in 2010. This means a woman aged between 15 and 49 will have 1.72 children in her lifetime (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012a:26). The general fertility rate, number of live births per 1000 women aged between 15 and 49 in urban Bangladesh, has also reduced from 119 in 1985 to 76 in 2010 (ibid.:28). Thus new women's (re)doing of motherhood can be categorized as part of a response to the changing society of Bangladesh, where women have the choice and means to have fewer children. However, I expand this argument by proposing that due to the age of some participants, and their ambivalent reasons for delaying motherhood, some are at least significantly delaying and possibly completely transgressing (although in disguise) mandatory motherhood. Nahar and Richters (2011) have argued that the stigma of childlessness is reducing in urban Bangladesh, and a very small number of middle-class women are opting for a voluntary childfree life, although they may choose to hide their choice by blaming infertility. The new women of this research may be part of this small group of women, who are disguising their transgression of mandatory motherhood for personal educational, professional and caring responsibilities towards others. But they are still bound by social norms that disallow them to openly express their autonomous choices of voluntary childfree lives.

The percentages of never-married females at age group 15–19 and 20–24 were 31.3 and 5.1 respectively in 1981 and have increased to 57.3 and 9.1 percent in 2011, showing a modest upward trend to later marriage (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2012a:25). However, the single women of this research have delayed marriage well into their 30s; their interest in homogamy, professional and educational pursuits and some of their reluctance towards actively seeking a life partner, can also be read as a way to express their disguised transgression of marriage normativity. Women's

divorce rate has also increased slightly from 0.54 to 0.98 per 1000 married women in urban Bangladesh (ibid.:29). Parvez (2011) found that divorced women's careers provide them with the opportunity and respectability to take decisions about their divorce and further decisions for themselves and their children. The only divorced participant of this research fits into this category, navigating the stigma and loss of respectability in relation to divorce. But single participants' comments about the disapproval of society and causing constant anxiety to their parents illuminate that women's professional or educational success is unlikely to make them free and fully autonomous individuals, as they are still accountable to conform to their gender roles.

Overall, with varying intensity, participants' comments highlight their ability to introduce alternative forms of respectable femininity, thus new womanhoods, responding to structural and institutional change in urban Bangladesh. I construct such understanding of new womanhood as a marker and practice of women's changing positions in Bangladeshi society and disguised transgression or pushing the boundaries of respectability in the country. Nonetheless, new women's reconstruction of respectability is not always accepted by others. New women partake in various negotiating strategies that consist of convincing family and society layer by layer, through capital accruals, conversions and legitimation of class privilege. In terms of their family, new women's symbolic roles of good daughterhood help in their reconstruction of respectability. Thus we can ask the question whether individual achievements are actually sufficient to overcome social constraints for new women?

Chapter 9: Conclusions

I started this research seeking to conduct a qualitative study based on use of audio-visual materials, focus group discussion and interviews to explore – how does being respectable impact ‘new womanness’ and how do new women subject positions contribute to an understanding of normative conceptions of middle-class respectable femininity in Bangladesh? I was motivated in part by my personal interest in expanding the focus of gendered sociological research from poor women to middle-class women of the country. Being a doctoral researcher and a member of the Bengali middle class myself, I took a reflexive approach to explore the dynamics of classed gender identities of new women in relation to notions of middle-class respectability. In this final chapter I return to my research questions and summarize my answers to them, building on the analysis of the literature in chapter two and drawing on the data presented in chapters five to eight. I also highlight the contribution of my thesis and its limitations and identify future research agendas.

My conceptual framework combines several key concepts: social class articulated in relation to capitals, taste and distinction (Bourdieu, 1992, 2008); (re)doing gender and class (West and Zimmerman, 1991, 2009); and boundary work (Lamont, 1992; Southerton, 2002). In addition I have used an account of the historical development of the concepts of new woman and respectable femininity in Western and South Asian contexts to draw from and differentiate the construction of these identities in contemporary Bangladesh. This conceptual framework has enabled me to evaluate change and continuity in the position of middle-class new women in Bangladesh today.

Broadly, this thesis has demonstrated that new women are part of a distinct social group in urban Bangladesh, a neoliberal affluent middle class, whose ‘newness’ is observable generally in relation to their progress in higher education, paid employment and exposure to transnational lifestyles; and more specifically in the performance of their gender, class and culturally attuned selfhood through their smart dressing, 50-50 work-home life balance and investment in the self. They accrue, convert and legitimize various capitals, which fundamentally valorize their status, but at the same time help them survive and navigate through the multiple respectability norms that are imposed upon them in relation to work-home life balance, aesthetic practices, and rising individual aspirations for the self. The research recognizes how new womanhood and social change are in a dialogical relationship with each other. New women partake in continuous boundary work, conforming, negotiating and potentially transgressing the boundaries of middle-class respectability, to become subjects of value, and dissolve some old bases of their inferior position in a patriarchal society. However, while new women are able to generate individual level changes, they barely change the overall patriarchal and capitalist structure of Bangladeshi society. Nevertheless, detailed articulation of new womanhood helps us explore the heterogeneity of classed gender practices and the changing parameters within which women negotiate their value in Bangladesh today.

Research Contribution and Findings

This research adds to the nascent field of new women studies in Bangladesh and is the first to argue that along with capital investment and conversion, the (re)doing of

respectable femininity legitimizes new womanhoods. Bourdieu (1992) argues that legitimacy is arbitrary in any cultural context, and it is we who recognize this arbitrariness. In this case by assigning what is the right form of respectability in a given context women legitimize their new women status, rather than new womanhood being an inherently legitimate end in itself. Theoretically this thesis takes forward Skegg's (1997) and Radhakrishnan's (2009, 2011) understanding of respectability by articulating it as a redoing and arguing that attention needs to be paid to both the structural context within which respectability is performed, and the everyday interactional level of doing respectability. Doing so contributes to the postcolonial project of disrupting binaries, in relation to modernity vs tradition and respectable vs unrespectable femininity, opening up scope to study how respectability is done differently and in multiple ways, creating inter-class and intra-class distinctions by new women. I argue that rather than asking what new women aspire to become (modern or traditional/ respectable or unrespectable) we should ask how new women legitimize their aspirations/position. Through close analysis of new women's various (re)doings of respectability, I have demonstrated that their continuous capital investment in the self and their families, and their cultural capital of knowing how to legitimize practices as respectable, in different fields (work, home/ family and society at large) they add value and legitimacy to their self-aspirations. Thus I contend that the power of new womanhood lies in their ability to legitimize which status claims are respectable in what context, rather than conforming to generalized norms of respectability across all fields, or abandoning them altogether. This research did not just identify the existence of new women in Bangladesh, but the power of the new women's identities of progressive yet respectable women, which legitimize their dominant class position at the same time. This enables us to deconstruct the political

space of binaries of tradition and modernity and carve out a third or 'other' site (Menon, 2005) for women to bring some improvement to their inferior gender position in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh.

Following Gilbertson (2011), I contend that privileged class position and gender equality are positively related. I presented normative conceptions of middle-class respectability as a binding force or a 'burden' (ibid.:183) that new women manage to navigate through their contribution to class privilege. As new women gain access to higher education, highly-paid employment and are able to afford various capital investments of goods, leisure activities and transnational lifestyles, they can make certain changes in their gendered roles within the family and society. Following Radhakrishnan (2011:12), I argue that although the achievement of new women 'does not completely eliminate conventional expectations that their families might have of them... [it] gives them a significant say in their own life trajectories'. This has been echoed by Karim (2010:71), who also argued that professional career and education add 'respectability', which results in the 'acceptability' for a woman to be 'left alone' by others, and enable her 'to live life...on her own terms' in Bangladesh.

Such an understanding of new womenness is different from the studies of women's empowerment and autonomy in Bangladesh, which demonstrate that poor women's participation in paid employment invokes hostility and causes anxiety about men's and women's power relations within the family. Poor married women never spend money on themselves or their natal families and seek their marital family's affection and respect by carrying out all domestic chores, despite participation in paid employment (Kabeer, 1997). In addition, women are highly dependent on their husbands and do not wish to disrupt marital relationships, despite child marriage,

domestic violence, polygamy etc. Overall working-class women see a greater premium attached to affiliation with men than to an autonomous life (Kabeer, 2011). My findings have both similarities and differences with Kabeer's findings. On the one hand new women's paid employment is more widely accepted by families (with some exceptions) and they are able to spend on their natal families and themselves as well as their marital families. However, household work still remains feminized, as new women only substitute their work through co-opting other women like mothers-in-law, and still make a public display of doing domestic work at social events. New women are able to utilize their role of 'good daughter' to economically contribute to their natal family, and 'good daughter-in-law' by capital investment in their family and keeping up a public performance of domestic work, to legitimize their self-aspirations and leave behind their subordinate position. Finally, Kabeer (2011) claims that working class women are unable to choose an alternative life for themselves in terms of walking out of an abusive marriage or choosing not to marry. But I have shown that access to privileged resources enables some affluent middle-class new women to claim divorce, and delay motherhood and marriage, making alternative lives for themselves in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh. To elaborate on the above points I discuss the empirical findings of the research in more detail through addressing the research questions of the thesis once again.

Do participants identify as the new women of Bangladesh? How is she configured from their standpoints and to what extent do participants conform to their notion of new women?

In chapter five I demonstrated that all participants in this research identified themselves as new women, part of an affluent middle-class community of Bangladesh. Through accrual, conversion and legitimation of various capitals, such as second

generation urban habitus; higher education degrees from Bangladeshi or Western universities; highly-paid professions in reputed organizations; and continuous investment in the self and the family, they generate the symbolic power of the affluent middle-class new women which reproduces inter-class distinctions. In addition, their cultural capital of knowing how to practise smart dressing and how to maintain a 50-50 work-home life balance enables them to legitimize their taste for a certain transnational and professional lifestyle, and distinguishes them from other middle-class women, creating intra-class distinction.

The findings of this research are similar to those of new women and respectability research in other South Asian countries, where professional women's 'background' enables them to continuously distinguish themselves from other women. New women's 'background', especially in India, is articulated in relation to private schools, proficiency in English, highly competitive higher education, enabling individuals to gain jobs in specific elite sectors such as the IT industry or corporate sector, and practise 'non-traditional (contemporary), liberated (westernised) and "trendy" (modern)' lives (Thapan, 2004:414; Radhakrishnan, 2011). Indian new women's elite or new middle class status is articulated in relation to their careers in global and elite workplaces, consumerism, thin bodies and Western aesthetic practices (Radhakrishnan, 2011; Thapan, 2004; Talukdar and Linders, 2013; Daya, 2009). However, this literature primarily suggests that the 'modernity of this figure (new women) is only skin-deep and is not accompanied by a shift from traditional values and expectations of femininity' (Daya, 2009:98) and 'an older vision of respectability centered around feminine domesticity' (Radhakrishnan, 2009:204). Particularly, in relation to respectability, only Radhakrishnan (2009) suggests that 'alternative femininities' are being sanctioned by new women, but she does not explain how these

sanctions operate nor define the alternative femininities, particularly in relation to household-level negotiations.

I agree with the Indian literature and expand it to the Bangladeshi context, arguing that new women are part of an upwardly mobile neoliberal affluent middle class in Bangladesh. I also agree that their autonomy is still circumscribed by their familial duties. But I expand Radhakrishnan's (2009) claim for 'alternative femininities' to alternative forms of respectability. I use the concept of boundary work (Southerton, 2002; Lamont, 1992) and (re)doing (West and Zimmerman, 2009) to argue that new women mix historically rooted notions of respectability (in relation to their domestic duties and propriety) and their own reconstructions of respectable practices to construct and perform alternative forms of respectability in neoliberal urban Bangladesh. Participants' accounts identified the two key sites of alternative forms of respectability as 50-50 work-home life balance and smart dressing practices.

How do the new women (re)do respectability in the context of workplaces?

In chapter five I indicated that new women merge the boundaries of middle-class Bengali cultural attire of sari and salwar kameez with working-class religious attires and upper-class and Western women's sexualized attires, through the hybrid aesthetic practice of smart dressing. In chapter six, I further argued that smart dressing is influenced by informal and implicit aesthetic labour norms of new women's workplaces, but not completely bound by them. I demonstrated that new women's conformation, negotiation and transgression of organizational aesthetic labour norms impacts their negotiation with respectable and unrespectable aesthetic practices in their everyday lives. Thus I identified new women's bodies and the various ways they

adorn them as a key site on which new women legitimize their classed taste and introduce alternative forms of respectable femininity.

Women's bodies have been a primary concern of research on Indian new women. Such research claims that women 'recruit and make use of' both traditional and Western meanings of the body 'to construct a sense of self that gives them some freedom to move about in the modern world without challenging their claims to an authentic Indian identity' (Talukdar and Linders, 2013:118). This balance of old and new and tradition and modernity is studied in relation to Indian new women's representation of the self through slim bodies (ibid.) and Western attires denoting their modern and cosmopolitan lifestyle and displaying their economic independence through their capacity to consume beauty and personal care products (Thapan, 2004) and finding a 'good balance' between Indian and Western clothing practices (Gilbertson, 2014). Thapan (2009) identified a discrepancy between the Western embodiment practices of new women in workplaces and the expectation of their families in relation to practising authentic Indian embodiment practices. But none of this research explored organizational control over women's negotiation with clothing practices. I have included aesthetic labour (Warhurst et al, 2003) within the articulation of respectability, which makes an important contribution to expanding studies of women's embodied respectability beyond notions of national culture and consumerism. I demonstrated how aesthetic labour can be imposed in informal and implicit ways in various types of organizations, where some Bangladeshi new women are able to transgress or challenge these norms, while others negotiate or conform to them.

Through theorizing Bangladeshi new women's smart dressing as an alternative form of respectable aesthetic practice (as opposed nationalist sari and salwar kameez), I expanded the new women and respectability literature, arguing that organizational aesthetic labour norms can influence new women's choice and agency in reshaping the boundaries of their aesthetic respectability. I argued that younger new women in various sectors are more prone to hybrid forms of smart dressing. In addition those who lived in Western countries also have a personal taste for smart dressing (with some exceptions). Meanwhile older women mostly wear respectable Bengali cultural attire and sometimes also conform to organizational smart dressing norms, through context-specific smart dressing. But all women wear Western garb when in Western countries. Thus I argued that corporate organizations and anonymity of new women in Western spaces provide new women with the freedom to experiment with their aesthetic practices. I have identified sites of transgression of organizational aesthetic labour norms in public and educational institutes and NGOs and development organizations, where participants' salaries are lower and aesthetic labour norms less strict than the corporate sector. In highly-paid corporate jobs participants mostly conform to aesthetic labour requirements, even when they are discriminatory in terms of being incompatible with their religious identity. This is the first study that explores aesthetic labour norms in the Bangladeshi service sector. In doing so I have demonstrated that, although new women often conform to and perform aesthetic labour to gain rewards from their professions, some are able to negotiate, transgress and show ambivalence towards these norms.

How do the new women (re)do respectable femininity in the context of the family?

In chapter seven I argued that new women utilize their privileged class position in negotiating domestic roles and relationships, which provides them with control over their time, enabling them to give equal time to both work and familial commitments. I identify this as a 50-50 work-home life balance, and an alternative form of respectable femininity (as opposed to prioritizing family above career). New women in some cases negotiate with their familial duties through living in semi-extended households, changing the power relations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and limiting familial socializing. However, these practices are not homogeneous, and differ according to new women's capacity to invest capitals in themselves and their families, their age, experience of living in a Western country and professional positions.

South Asian literature on new women and respectability identifies 'balance' of work and home as women prioritizing their familial roles above careers, to maintain respectability (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Fernando and Cohen, 2013). In addition, none of the literature explores women's household negotiations, focusing only on how women negotiate with workplace responsibilities to maintain a work-home life balance that favours home. I expand this literature by demonstrating that new women of Bangladesh partake in complex negotiations within the home to achieve a 50-50 work-home life balance. This is done by continuously investing capitals on the self and their families. Such investment of capitals and legitimization of their class privilege enables them to either avoid or share their unpaid labour within the home with their mothers-in-law or household help. This in turn permits them to spend the time they save on domestic duties on their careers. However, this alternative form of

respectability can sometimes be subject to disciplining by new women's families, so some new women often partake of activities deemed unrespectable, such as night time socializing for work, but conceal them from their families. In addition, alongside new women's substitution of their domestic work, they still maintain a public performance of domestic roles, by attending familial socializing and representing the family at festivals and weddings, thus they do not necessarily disrupt the normative idea of the respectable good daughter-in-law. I contend that this concealment of unrespectable practices and public performance of good daughter-in-law duties are the strategies which legitimize participants' new womanhood, maintaining a progressive yet respectable persona.

To what extent are new women of Bangladesh transgressing norms of respectability and how?

Alternative forms of respectable femininity in Bangladesh include some radical transformations, in relation to female individualization through autonomous control over time and spending and delaying motherhood and marriage. In chapter eight I argued that some childless and single participants' ambivalence towards childbirth and marriage can be constructed as potential sites of transgression, although they choose to conceal their transgressive choice in order to keep up the performance of conventional notions of respectability.

A nascent group of literature on middle-class professional women and new women in Bangladesh has started to address how socio-economic change in women's lives is enabling them to pursue autonomous decisions about their sexual identities and practices (Karim, 2012), about living childfree lives (Nahar and Richters, 2011) and claiming divorce (Parvez, 2011). At the same time female individualization literature

addresses how women's higher education, profession and international migration enable them to negotiate individualistic goals within their feminine identities through spending time and money on the self, postponing marriage and childbirth, claiming divorce etc. (Kim, 2012).

Drawing from the concept of female individualization, I contribute to the Bangladeshi literature and demonstrate that participants' narratives of alternative forms of respectability incorporated female individualization processes. New women participants who are married and are mothers practice autonomous control over their time and spending patterns and partake in leisure activities which were unavailable to previous generation of middle-class women in Bangladesh. Married participants who do not have children and single participants primarily identify their educational and professional aspirations and their breadwinner role for their natal families as their reason for delaying motherhood and marriage. As two participants of this research are 38 years old and want to postpone motherhood further, and another two single participants are reluctant to either date men or accept arranged marriage proposals, I argue that such ambivalence towards motherhood and marriage may in fact be a concealed transgression of respectability norms in relation to mandatory motherhood and marriage. Such concealed transgression is a strategy of participants to legitimize their form of new womanhood, rather than openly abandoning respectability norms. I agree with Kim (2012) that new women's individual aspirations are bound within a set of pre-existing norms guarded by their families and society at large. Despite new women's significant contribution in class formation and contribution to the household, playing the roles of 'good daughter' and 'good daughter-in-law', their alternative practices are under surveillance and transgressions are subject to discipline by the family or the society. Some of their practices of agency and choice end up replicating

processes that reinforce the privilege of men and capitalism, as women are still accountable for feminine roles and are mostly reluctant to disrupt their careers through marriage and childbirth.

Future Research Agendas

In this research I have generally argued that considering the neoliberal turn in Bangladesh and the boom in the middle class, it is essential that gender studies includes research on affluent middle-class new women and their varied understanding and performance of respectability. Understanding the everyday ways in which they add value to themselves helps to explain how they are able to challenge women's inferior position in society. I have provided an important starting point for exploring the complex and nuanced ways in which women can negotiate with norms of respectability and practice new womanhoods, marked by change and stasis in Bangladesh. However, due to the small and privileged class sample of this research my findings cannot be generalized across the Bangladeshi context. My framework can be further developed through the following:

1. Through exploring if the conceptualization of respectability and new womanhood can be applied to other classes of women. For example, in Bangladesh are RMG workers or microfinance beneficiaries able to practise alternative forms of respectability and new womanhood?
2. Are the concepts of new womanhood and respectability imperative when studying South Asian diaspora in more developed Western countries?
3. Do the concepts of respectability and new womanhood have traction among women in the West? Particularly in countries like the UK where society is

marked by multiculturalism and diversity, how are notions of respectability and new womanhood constructed differently across different ethnic groups in different fields?

Concluding Thoughts

I claim that the new women of Bangladesh provide an image of womanhood that is contrary to the poor, uneducated, traditional, bound by religion, sexually constrained and victimized 'third world woman' (Mohanty, 1991). They are part of a new and potentially powerful social group whose aspirations resemble what Mohanty (2003) identified as those of the privileged One-Third of the world located geographically in both global North and the South, economically and socially a transnational class, occupying a privileged position in the society they live in. Even though Bangladeshi new women's position in the global South locates them within the two-thirds of the world, or the 'third world women' category, I claim that their social and economic position puts them in a dominant class position and may enable them to associate themselves with the One-Third of the world.

In summary the thesis makes three arguments. Firstly, new women are part of the neoliberal affluent middle class, who construct their class identity as a status group, claiming inter-class and intra-class distinction through their capital investments and performances of alternative forms of respectable femininity. Secondly, alternative forms of respectability are not an abandonment of old structures of respectability, rather women conform, negotiate and potentially transgress normative conceptions of middle-class respectable femininity, substituting, concealing, or legitimizing various practices in various fields. Thirdly, new women's practices of respectability are

neither fixed nor homogeneous, revealing multiple constructions and reconstructions of respectable practices in relation to age, stage of life (marital and motherhood status), experience of living in Western countries, types of profession and household settings. Thus new women perform respectability differently and in multiple ways in urban Bangladesh. Such a heterogeneous understanding opens the opportunity to expand the framework of new womenness to other groups of women, from various class, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participants' Pseudo Names and the Reason for Choice of Names

No	Pseudo Name	Age	Marital Status	Children	Reason for choice of Name
1.	Life	40	Married	3	
2.	Complete (Shompon)	32	Single	0	I think I accomplished all the goals I had set out for myself when I was young. So I think I am complete now.
3.	Butterfly	32	Married	1	I am always looking for new opportunities and am mostly able to do many things at the same time. I fly from one goal to the other whether they are familial, educational or work related.
4.	Happy	38	Married	0	Because I am happy with who I am, with all the pros and cons of life.
5.	Flora	33	Married	0	Flora in Latin means Goddess of plants or flowers. I see myself as not just a woman but as you would say a new woman, somewhat of an exemplary woman in my family.
6.	Modernity (Adhunika)	35	Single	0	I am the ideal modern woman, and I want to lead younger women into modernity.
7.	Nest	34	Divorced	0	I fly away to achieve all that is achievable for me, but I always with to return to my country, my family and my traditions.
8.	Flower	39	Married	1	I would call myself onion but that's a bit too crude. I choose Flower as it has many petals which make the whole. I have many aspirations in various directions which make me.
9.	Free Spirit	34	Married	2	People around me always call me a free spirit. I believe in the present and live my life in the present.
10.	Fighter	40	Married	2	I have always had to fight for my identity and achievement, nothing came to me easily.
11.	Caller (Ahobankari)	45	Married	4	Like the Prophet. Caller believes she is an example for younger women, as she worked hard follow her dreams.

12.	Destiny's Child	35	Married	2	I always got the things I wanted without having to fight for it.
13.	Instinct	35	Singe	0	I have always followed my instinct, and so far it has paid off wonderfully. I have achieved many things most girls only wish to achieve but may not always succeed.
14.	Singing Bird	38	Married	2	
15.	Decision Maker	35	Married	1	I have always taken all the decisions of my life myself. And I don't regret anything.
16.	Hope	34	Married	1	The actual meaning of my name is hope, and I always hope for new and better things, that keeps me going.
17.	Freedom	35	Married	0	I acquired freedom from many constraints through perseverance.
18.	Integrity	38	Married	0	I live my life in my own terms, by my own morals and am able to manage everyone else's support.
19.	Informed (Shocheton)	35	Married	0	I am aware and well informed of the gender politics in society. I respond to them as I see fit in a given situation.
20.	Independent	38	Married	2	Being independent is most important to me.
21.	Brave	35	Married	0	I am not afraid to step out of my comfort zone and I never give up.

Appendix 2: Transcription of Mobile Phone Advertisements

A1. BBC Janala (60 seconds)



A homemaker is shown preparing breakfast. The mobile phone rings.

Wife: Hey, it's your phone.

Husband is in shower. Phone keeps on ringing.

Wife: are you listening? It's your phone.

Husband: Oh can you answer it?

Wife answers the phone.

Wife: Hello

Caller (foreigner): Hello, this is Martin can I speak to Mr. Hasan?

Wife: yes (in bangla)...yes (in English).

The wife goes to the bathroom door and tells her husband

Wife: Oh it's a foreigner. (in a scared voice)

Husband: Just say something.

Wife hesitates and thinks for a few seconds and gets back on the phone

Wife: Hello Mr. Martin, please call back in about 5 minutes he is in shower. (Smiles and is very confident)

Caller: Oh sure, thank you.

Wife: You are Welcome.

Husband from behind: English? How?

Wife: BBC Janala (window). (Smiling goes back to the kitchen and continues making breakfast)

Background voice: Now to learn English in BBC Janala you can directly call at 300011 and access everyday English lessons.

The husband finishes his breakfast and while leaving the wife wittily asks in English

Wife: Did he call you back? Hm? (And grins)

Background voice: BBC Janala, if you want you can!

A2. Grameen Phone Nokia Eid Offer (50 Seconds)



A working girl returns to her working women's hostel in a rickshaw at night. Getting off the rickshaw she thinks : Sometimes it gets so late when I return!

Upon entering the premises the security guard says

Guard: Sister, your father called.

The woman picks up the phone lying on the guard's table and calls her village. A shopkeeper answers the phone while closing the shop from which shop the woman's father calls her.

Shopkeeper: Uncle has left, he waited so long!

Woman: Oh ok.

Then she thinks: this has happened so many times. He walks such a long distance to just talk to me but has to return disappointed.

Next scene shows the woman in the village on a cycle cart, usually used for goods transport. She thinks to herself: this Eid I am going home, just the thought is making me so happy. Father will be so happy. And I am taking the best possible gift for father.

Background voice announces the package deal for the Nokia phone set and the service.

Next the happy father is shown to have bought the same gift of a mobile phone for his daughter.

Woman: father! You too? (and smiles)

The two then sits in a bed talking and laughing.

Background voice: May the joy of staying close change your Eid experience.

Stay close with Grameen phone.

A3. Anik Telecom (52 Seconds)



With loud and energetic background music a young woman wakes up in her bed in pink satin night suit. The mobile phone rings and it's her boyfriend calling her while jogging at the park. But she cannot hear him, turns out the boyfriend has low battery. The woman plugs in her phone for charging.

In the next scene she is shown to dance to her laptop in a Western formal suit while her mother in traditional sari serves tea to her and her brother.

Next she is at work (an architect) and is presenting to a group, when another lady enters with a newspaper with the news of the 1st lady's nomination for woman achiever award. The young woman is very happy. And is congratulated by her colleagues.

Her boyfriend tries to call her again but when she answers due to his phone's low battery they fail to talk to each other. In this scene the young woman is driving a convertible car, dressed in trousers and shirt. She goes to a phone accessories shop and buys the same battery charger she uses.

In the evening she is dressed in a sari and drives to the award ceremony. She wins the woman of the year award and is applauded by everyone.

Finally when her boyfriend arrives to meet her she gives him the battery charger. And the background voice announces: Anik Mobile and Battery charger gives you the power to communicate. Anik Telecom-unleash possibilities.

[Translation of the song: o o o gear up. So much talk so much music. An ocean in the heart keeps building dreams in the expands of the imagination. Give me life...give me fame...let the talks go on like there is no limit...o o o gear up. Communication becomes alive with the touch of Anik Telecom. O o o gear up.]

A4. Aktel (90 Seconds)



A group of friends, 3 men and 2 women are off to a holiday out of town. They are pulling each other's leg while in the car.

Man 1: Oooff, finally we are out of Dhaka.

Man 2: Don't you dare complain, you are the one who could never make time after we went to St. Martin Island.

Man 1: you are saying it's my fault? Did I cancel the Kathmandu plan?

Man 3 jokes with girl one who is sitting by herself at the back.

Man 3: What do you say Darling? Should I come join you at the back?

Woman 1 shows a slap and says: move away from me! (jokingly)

While everyone laughs away they notice an elderly couple on the road. A man lying on the roadside, and the woman crying and requesting their car to stop.

After crossing the couple they stop and the 2nd woman says: Get off right now!

They go to the couple.

Elderly woman: He has chest pain since morning.

Man 3: What do you think? (looks at woman 2)

Woman 2: I think it's a Cardiac arrest. We need to take him to the hospital right away.

Everyone brings the old man in their car.

Man 1: Is there any hospital nearby?

Woman 2: Forget it, we need to take him to Dhaka.

Woman 1: Reduce the temperature of the air conditioning.

Man 3 calls someone: Abdul, take out all there is in the cash and meet us at the hospital.

Woman 2 calls her superior doctor on the phone: Sir, the patient is in front of me, I can't find the pulse...yes sir.

Meanwhile a group of hooligans stop the car with sticks. When the men at the front seat lower their window the hooligans announce no one can enter Dhaka now! When they see the patient and the angry look in the eyes of the men and women they say

Hooligan: hey they seem to be in a crisis, let them go.

They rush off to the hospital while man 3 gets a confirmation on his phone about which hospital to go to.

Man 3: is everything ready at the hospital?

They reach the hospital and after some wait the old man recovers and blesses them with a raised hand. Background song begins and they head back happily.

Background voice: Every possibility combined. Aktel- possible everything is possible.

Appendix 3: Focus Group Discussion Guidelines

Introduction

- All participants introduced themselves (this included name, name of organizations they work for, designation, marital and motherhood status).
- Researcher explained research objectives, protection of confidentiality of information gathered, recording of discussion on tape and access to research findings (if participants were interested)
- Obtained consent of all participants in writing.

Saliency of the research topic

- Existing research is calling the urban, middle class, highly educated, mid-level professional women of South Asia and Bangladesh the ‘new women’. To what extent is this appropriate? Do you think new women is an appropriate name for this group of women?
- What are the characteristics of new women in Bangladesh today?
- Do you think you are a new woman?

Showing the Selected Mobile Phone Advertisements

- Asked the participants to select a new women from the ads or to identify characteristics of a new woman from either the ads or from their own experience and observation of other women around them. Identify the most important characteristics of the new women.
- Is new womenness a new phenomenon in Bangladesh?
- Has the number of new women increased in urban Bangladesh?
- How are new women different from other women of Bangladesh?
- To what extent are contemporary new women different from previous generation of women which same characteristics? Were they new women too?

Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to add to the research topic of new womanhood?
- Do you have any questions about the research?
- Would you like to be an interview participant of this research?

Thank the participants and keep the option of returning to them if needed in future.

Appendix 4: Personal Detail Form

Name:

Pseudonym:

Age:

Marital Status:

Number of Children:

Designation and Organization:

Length of Full time employment:

Education Level:

School, College, University:

Location of Residence:

Appendix 5: Face to Face Semi-Structured Interview Questions & Checklist

Questions

1. Through literature review and a focus group discussion urban, middle class, university educated, and professional women have been identified as the new women of South Asia and Bangladesh. Do you agree that these characteristics make a woman the new woman of Bangladesh?
 - If yes, go to question 2.
 - If no, then what characteristics would the new women have?
2. Show advertisements: Do you think any of the women characters can be identified as a new woman?
 - If yes, why is she a new women?
 - If no, why not, and how would you describe a new woman?
3. Do you identify yourself as a new woman of Bangladesh?
4. How did you become a new woman?
 - Checklist of topics:
 - How are new women different from any other woman?
 - Influence of gender, class, religion and culture on identities of new womanhood.
 - Constraints and liberties of new woman, within the home and workplaces.
5. Do you think the number of new women are increasing in Dhaka?
 - If yes, why? When did you start noticing this group of women in Dhaka? What brought these women out in the public sphere?
 - If no, are there any reasons why women are not able to achieve certain things in Bangladeshi society?
6. Are there any generational differences among new women and working women of previous generations?
7. If you were to give yourself a name (following Bangladeshi naming culture), which would describe you as a person, what would you name yourself, and why?

Closing

Is there anything else you would like to add to the understanding of new woman or your own identity as a new woman?

Do you have any questions for me?

Provide a broad time frame when the interviewee will be contacted for the second phase of interviews.

Would you be able to refer me to another person (female) like you who might be interested in participating in my research?

Appendix 6: Long distance Interview Topics and Questions

As the topics of discussion varied from participants to participant in phase two of the interviews here I am providing a sample topic list for one of the participants-Free Spirit.

Questions

1. In the 1st interview we discussed changing fashion practices for new women particularly at corporate work places like yours. Can you elaborate on how your clothing practices are influenced by your work organization?
2. In our last interview we discussed how you changed your household setting from extended family to semi-extended setting when you moved next door to your in-laws. Can you elaborate on how this change impacted your relationship with various members of your household?
3. What gives you a sense of self-fulfilment as a new woman?

[Depending on participants' answers to the broad topics mentioned above I asked them further clarification questions during the 2nd phase of interviews]

Appendix 7: Participant Consent Form

Informed Consent

Date:

Study Name: Boundaries of Respectability: The ‘New Woman’ of Bangladesh

Researcher: Nazia Hussein, Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, UK.

Purpose of Research: This study will contribute to feminist analysis of negotiated agency among urban, university educated, working women of Bangladesh. In addition, it will explore the realities of the new women represented in the media and attempt to understand how and why different characteristics constitute the image of the new women in the country.

Participant’s Involvement: Your participation will involve an initial face to face interview and possible future interviews via e-mail or any other electronic medium.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. I can also guarantee that this research does not have any risk on your part, and if at any point you feel uncomfortable answering any question you may choose not to answer that specific query.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All the information you provide during the research will be confidential and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data will be protected under the Data Protection Act (1998). As the controller of data in this research I will ensure that no one but me has access to the data.

Contact Details: You may contact me for any clarification or information, N.Hussein@Warwick.ac.uk

Cell (Dhaka): 0172 007 2222

Cell (UK): +44 (0)78 5258 3845

I _____, consent to participate in the study ‘**Negotiated Identities: The ‘New Woman’ of Bangladesh**’ conducted by *Nazia Hussein*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix 8: Clothing Practices in Bangladesh

The normative clothing practices among Bangladeshi women, regardless of class, are the sari and the salwar kameez. In colonial and post-colonial Bengal the sari epitomized nationalist culture, resisting colonial and West Pakistan's power. Today a shift has come through the young, professional and urban women's choice of cultural clothing whereby saris are now termed as 'ethnic' wear suitable for occasion and formal wear such as professional events, weddings, religious and cultural festivals, events most important to the individuals, family, community and nation. The salwar kameez, is more popular among young women, it is a three part dress consisting of a long loose fitting trouser and loose fitting tunic/long top paired with a scarf which can be worn in various different ways. Girls aged between 12 and 16 wear the salwar kameez as school uniform. The widespread practice of the *salwar kameez* among young women is linked to societal changes. In earlier times, young girls would switch to wearing the *sari* when they got married, which was soon after puberty. But as women began to marry later, they faced a problem as single adults they could neither wear the attire of their childhood nor were they ready to wear the *sari*. Hence, they started wearing the *salwar kameez*, which met their modesty requirements. For many women today, the *salwar kameez* is regarded as a progressive, modern and functional outfit that suits their modern lifestyle as opposed to the traditional sari (HO, 2013; Bahl, 2005).

The third and less popular clothing practice among Bangladeshi women is the 'Hijab', which in Islam is a state of modesty for women after they cross the age of puberty and not a particular piece of clothing. Although in some Western contexts it has come to stand for the Muslim headscarf or the *burqa*. It is more popular among urban poor women working in the garment factories and lower class young women in universities to maintain moral propriety when outside their homes (Rozario, 2006). But this research shows that some urban middle-class women are also starting to practice hijab. Finally, Western garb in Bangladesh most commonly means jeans and trousers paired with shirts and t-shirts worn by young women, mostly students and young professionals. Driven by infiltration of global media, rising disposable incomes, increasing number of women joining the workplace and wider cultural acceptance, especially among the middle to upper class young women, various forms of Western garb is more commonly visible in cities of Bangladesh. Although wearing Western attires, when in Western country is common among Bangladeshi women of all ages, wearing them in Bangladesh is still fairly uncommon for older married women. In addition, women's Western style clothing are often not significantly apart from cultural clothing, as many women wear jeans with a long top with or without a scarf, which resemble the salwar kameez, and others wear a *fatua/kurta* (long top) with trousers, mixing eastern and Western dress.

Appendix 9: Description of household settings

There are three types of households that participants live in. First, is the *nuclear household*, where participants live with husband and children. Although nuclear households consist of dual earner families in this research, the husband is still considered the primary breadwinner, and the wife's income is seen as a supplement for luxury consumer goods, foreign holidays, children's education and future economic investments for the family. Second, is the *semi-extended household*, where extended families live like neighbours, yet function as a family (Begum, 2008). In such a setting participants live next door to their in-laws, in housing owned by their in-laws, mostly sharing resources such as food, household help and cars. Most participants pay bills, the salary of a household help and some food expenses (expenses are shared with their husbands) but there is no formal financial contribution to the extended family. However, there exist various informal ways of making financial contributions, such as gifts. They also often eat together at the in-laws' house, but some participants, especially those with younger children, may have prepared food sent to their home by the in-laws. Third, is the *extended household* which consists of 'different generations of married couples and their children living in a single household, sharing a common pool of resources. The eldest patriarch of the family heads the household and makes the major decisions, while his wife exerts control over domesticity, especially the kitchen, child rearing, allocating resources and employing house help etc. In this system, all the men share blood ties; women are brought into the family through marriage or they are born into the family' (Sabur, 2010:128). For the participants of this research, the patriarch is the father-in-law and the MIL has control over domesticity, thus is the matriarch. I also identify the patriarch and the matriarch as boundary keepers of participants' 50-50 work-home life balance and respectability.

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